



REPORT 2018

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE WORLD



Aid to the
Church in Need

Religious Freedom in the World

Report 2018



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Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

REPORT 2018
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE WORLD

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Every effort has been made to ensure that the highest possible editorial standards have been met in the production of the Religious Freedom in the World report. However, in presenting the report, Aid to the Church in Need acknowledges that it could not independently verify all information contained therein without exception. The report draws on multiple sources and presents case studies with the objective of shedding light on the nature and severity of religious freedom violations. Care should be taken not to attach undue significance to instances selected for consideration; these are offered as examples illustrating the nature of the situation regarding religious freedom. In many cases, other examples would equally suffice. Views or opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Aid to the Church in Need but of those involved in compiling the various documents contained in the report.

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Foreword

by Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga

Archbishop of Bangui, Central African Republic

Here, in the Central African Republic, religious freedom is not a concept; it is a question of survival. The idea is not whether one is more or less comfortable with the ideological foundations underpinning religious freedom; rather, the issue is how to avoid a bloodbath!

Here, in Bangui, where the forces of destruction are well established, we do not have any choice. Either we succeed in restoring peace or we will disappear. And it is important to note that such a peace can only be founded on a genuine religious peace. In a multi-faith context, this is only possible if religious freedom is understood, accepted and upheld.

Be it in this country, where we have first-hand experience about the issues at stake or in other crisis-stricken parts of the world, it makes no sense to claim that the religious dimension is the one and only cause of the chaos. The reality is complex and modern crises are most often a consequence of multiple inter-connected factors.

Again and again, we see how political, economic and religious factors are all bound up with one another. On the whole, one unfortunately finds that the religious aspects of a crisis are exploited for the sake of political interest or, alternatively, economic gain, and very often, both at the same time.

This instrumentalisation of religion is very effective because religious feelings appeal to what lies deepest within us and undoubtedly religion has the capacity to arouse passionate emotions. Nowadays, the media in the West like to highlight these impulses in order to denigrate religion as a whole, and that is why we must always try to balance things out. This does not imply that religion is never a factor of tension or a serious cause of conflict but genuine discernment is required.

Within the Central African Republic, there was no religious tension before the current conflict erupted and which today has caused our country to descend into a situation of permanent violence. The resulting chaos allows protagonists of violence not only to despoil our nation's wealth but also

to pursue long-term political goals, thereby manipulating religious clashes for personal gain.

Working with other faith leaders, we have spared no effort to resolve – in so far as we can – these religious tensions and conflicts. We are taking risks; we are exposing ourselves to a great deal of criticism. However, this permanent search for inter-religious dialogue and reconciliation is unquestionably the last defence against the ultimate implosion of our country.

With this in mind, this Religious Freedom in the World report produced by Aid to the Church in Need is published at a time when it is sorely needed. This Report is a validation of the importance of what we are doing here in my country. In addition, this Report is a powerful encouragement in the midst of so many sources of frustration and disappointment. Finally, this Report is an invaluable tool demonstrating the vital need to bring about peace.

Religious freedom in its fullness eliminates the risk of religious instrumentalisation. It can also unite us by encouraging us to respect one another's differences and thereby put a stop to the political and economic manipulation to which we are subjected. A huge thank you to ACN for the service you are rendering to us by publishing this Report.

At-A-Glance

Findings

Period under review: June 2016 to June 2018 (inclusive)

1.
 - a) In the period under review, the situation for minority faith groups deteriorated in 18 of the 38 countries – almost half – found to have significant religious freedom violations. Especially serious decline was noted in China and India. In many of the others – including North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Eritrea – the situation was already so bad, it could scarcely get any worse.
 - b) Worsening intolerance towards religious minorities meant that for the first time two countries – Russia and Kyrgyzstan – were placed in the ‘Discrimination’ category.
 - c) Compared to two years ago, more countries with significant religious freedom violations showed signs of deteriorating conditions for faith minorities – 18 countries, up four on the figure for 2016.
 - d) An increase in religious freedom violations from state actors – authoritarian regimes – resulted in more countries showing a decline in religious liberty compared with 2016.
 - e) Conversely, a sharp decline in Al Shabaab militant violence meant that Tanzania and Kenya – ranked as ‘Persecution’ countries in 2016 – were re-categorised ‘Unclassified’ in 2018. While fewer Islamist religious freedom violations were noted in some countries, the position manifestly worsened in many others.
2. Aggressive nationalism, hostile to religious minorities, has worsened to the degree that the phenomenon can be called ultra-nationalism. Violent and systematic intimidation of religious minority groups has led to them being branded as disloyal aliens and threatening to the state.
3. There is increasing evidence of a curtain of indifference behind which vulnerable faith communities suffer, their plight ignored by a religiously illiterate West.
4. In the eyes of Western governments and the media, religious freedom is slipping down the human rights

priority rankings, being eclipsed by issues of gender, sexuality and race.

5. There has been a rapid and unexpected resettlement of some minority faith groups in parts of the Middle East formerly occupied by Daesh (ISIS) and other hyper-extremist groups.
6. Most Western governments have failed to provide urgently needed assistance to minority faith groups, especially displaced communities wishing to return home.
7. The success of military campaigns against Daesh and other hyper-extremists has concealed the spread of militant Islamist movements in regions of Africa, the Middle East and Asia.
8. Conflict between Sunni and Shia Islam has fuelled extremist groups including Daesh.
9. Fresh evidence shows the extent of sexual abuse of women by extremist groups and individuals in Africa, the Middle East and parts of the Indian subcontinent.
10. There has been an upsurge in extremist attacks in Europe and elsewhere in the West, motivated in part by religious hatred. The attacks suggest that the threat of militant extremism is now becoming universal, imminent and ever-present. As such, this threat can be called neighbourhood terrorism.
11. Islamophobia in the West has increased, in part as a result of the ongoing migrant crisis.
12. There is evidence of worsening anti-Semitism leading to a rise in the number of Jewish migrants to Israel.

*Details of Methodology
and Definitions*

Details of Methodology and
Definitions



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL


Aiuto alla Chiesa che Soffre - Ortus
con i Cristiani perseguitati
in tutto il mondo

Fontana di Trevi illuminata di rosso
per ricordare il martirio di Stefano nel mondo
Fontain of Trevi lit in red to commemorate
the Christian martyr St. Stephen in the world


Aiuto alla Chiesa che Soffre
con i Cristiani perseguitati
in tutto il mondo

Fontana di Trevi illuminata di rosso
per ricordare il martirio di Stefano nel mondo
Fountain of Trevi lit in red to commemorate
the Christian martyr St. Stephen in the world

Details of Methodology and Definitions

By: Marcela Szymanski, Editor, Religious Freedom in the World 2018

1. Definitions

For our report, we have studied, and used, the following sources in order to develop the definitions and parameters that will be used:

- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (webpages)
- UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief,
- The Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE, and its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights ODIHR (webpages as found under: <http://hatecrime.osce.org/what-hate-crime>)
- Dr. Heiner Bielefeldt, former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief (webpages and personal interviews)
- Former Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion to the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Prof. Massimo Introvigne (webpages and personal interviews)
- EU Guidelines for the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief (conversations with the responsible staff and policy-makers)
- UN Convention for the prevention and punishment of Genocide (1948)
- Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians (webpages and conversations with G. Kugler and Ellen Fantini)
- Dr Gregor Puppink, conversations on the philosophy of Freedom of Religion, government competences and limits to this freedom

Reports by the following organizations, particularly their methodology section, have been reviewed including:

- OSCE/ODIHR
- US Department of State
- Pew Research Center

- Open Doors/Worldwatch List
- The Transatlantic Academy's 2015 report "Faith, Freedom and Foreign Policy"
- Reports by the European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance
- The library of Human Rights Without Frontiers (www.hrwf.org)
- The library of Forum 18 (www.forum18.org)

Texts by experts including:

- John Newton's "Religious Freedom in Modern Societies"
- Jose Luis Bazán's "Discurso del odio, corrección política y libertad de expresión"

a) Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance". (Source: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>)

Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief is enshrined in Articles 18 of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which should be read in the light of the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment n°22.

Under international law, FoRB has two components:

- (a) the freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of one's choice - or no belief at all, and
- (b) the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief, individually or in community with others, in public or private, through worship, observance, practise and teaching.

Freedom of religion or belief is also protected by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 10 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights." (Source: paragraph -10 of the EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief)

b) Limits to Freedom of Religion

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB's webpages (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/Standards.aspx>), the limits to this fundamental freedom are determined by:

- The fundamental Human Rights of others, as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- Public interest. Demonstrable risk to public order and health

The Commission on Human Rights resolution 2005/40 (paragraph 12) and Human Rights Council resolution 6/37 (paragraph 14): “Further emphasizes that, as underlined by the Human Rights Committee, restrictions on the freedom to manifest religion or belief are permitted only if limitations are prescribed by law, are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others, and are applied in a manner that does not vitiate the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion;”

2. Determining whether an incident is a FoRB violation

For this Report, the first aspect that determines whether a violation of FoRB has taken place is the clearly distinguishable bias against the victim(s) because of their religion. For a complete list of FoRB violations typified by the United Nations, please scroll down the following webpage: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/Standards.aspx>

3. Determining what type of violation of FoRB is described in the Report

For this Report, we understand violations to FoRB as a process, where we distinguish three stages. The definitions and what constitutes the passage to the next stage are described below. A grid listing manifestations of each type of violation appears at the end of this document, and is assembled from the different sources we cite:

- a) Intolerance
- b) Discrimination
- c) Persecution
- d) Genocide

4. Classifications

a) Intolerance. This ranges from “no problem at all” to various degrees of ‘intolerance’, which exist to some extent in all countries and cultures. It takes, however, a turn for the worse when intolerance is openly shown and remains uncontested by the relevant authorities. A “new normal” starts to take shape. We identify here a stage where intolerance develops with the repetition of uncontested messages portraying a particular group as dangerous or noxious in a society. Intolerance occurs principally on a social and cultural level – clubs, sporting events, neighbourhoods, press articles, political discourse and popular culture such as cinema and television. Opinion leaders at all levels (parents, teachers, journalists, sports stars, politicians, etc.) can promote these messages.

However:

- The aggrieved still have recourse to law. Intolerance is not yet ‘discrimination’. Fundamental rights to non-discrimination still apply.

- In countries where the rule of law is functioning (as in Western democracies), courts may address intolerance issues as hate crimes. In many countries, however, there is no recourse to law regarding intolerance. Hate crimes can follow the “normalisation” of intolerance messages and are often perpetrated by non-State, private actors. The definition of “hate crime” we use is from ODIHR: “Hate crimes are criminal acts motivated by bias or prejudice towards particular groups of people. To be considered a hate crime, the offence must meet two criteria: First, the act must constitute an offence under criminal law; second, the act must have been motivated by bias.” Discrimination and persecution, however, are seldom contemplated in the applicable criminal law, and are perpetrated by both public and private actors.

Intolerance is the most difficult to quantify as it is more often defined as a ‘feeling’. But it conditions the environment with the repetition of negative messages portraying a group as dangerous to the status quo. If at all, the negative messages are contested by individuals or opinion leaders, who then point the finger to less defined entities such as “the media” or “the local culture”, or to certain political figures. However, if the victim does not report acts of intolerance, or the authorities do not react firmly against it, the ground is prepared for worse.

- b) Discrimination:** This follows where intolerance goes unchecked. Discrimination occurs when there are laws or rules that apply to a particular group and not to all. The hallmark of ‘discrimination’ is a change in law which entrenches a treatment of, or a distinction against, a person based on the group, class, or category to which that person belongs. In this case, it is usually the State that becomes the perpetrator violating religious freedom. Blasphemy laws, because they place one belief above all others, appear at this stage. Although discrimination might be legal domestically, it remains illegal according to the UN and the OSCE Charter of Human Rights. Victims can only rely on the international community for help. Instances of discrimination include limitations in access to jobs (including public office), the inability to buy or repair property, to live in a certain neighbourhood or to display symbols of faith.
- c) Persecution:** This follows discrimination. Persecution and discrimination usually co-exist, the one building on the other. However persecution by, say, a local terrorist group can exist in a country without State-driven discrimination being present. Persecution is an active programme or campaign to exterminate, drive away, or subjugate people based on membership of a religious group. Both State and non-State actors may perpetrate persecution against a given group and that group has no recourse to State law. Persecution has a systematic rather than opportunistic character. Private actors who commit hate crimes against a group are unlikely to be punished. Victims are legally abused, dispossessed and sometimes killed. Persecution is identified and quantifiable through media reports, government and NGO reports or via local associations. Violence frequently accompanies persecution. Minority groups may be subject to murder, expropriation of property, theft, deportation, exile, forced conversion, forced marriage,

blasphemy accusations, etc. These acts take place “legally” according to the national laws. In extreme cases “persecution” may turn into genocide.

d) Genocide: It is the ultimate form of persecution where only the international law seems to be capable to intervene. Genocide comprises “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”, as per the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, adopted on 9 December 1948 (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CrimeOfGenocide.aspx>). It is not a ‘requisite’ to be dead in order to be a victim of genocide, as the acts in question include:

- Killing members of the group;
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

Also, not only perpetrators are liable by this convention but also those who conspire, incite to commit it or are complicit to its realization. After the European Parliament approved a resolution calling genocide the acts of Daesh against Christians and Yezidis (4Feb2016), many other nations followed suit including the United States. By creating a mechanism for bringing Daesh to justice (Res.2379) on 21 September 2017, the UN also is seeking to establish whether genocide has taken place. <http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.html>

5. Perpetrators of ‘Intolerance’, ‘Discrimination’, ‘Persecution’ and ‘Genocide’:

Today’s entities such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram or the drug/human trafficking cartels are no longer subject to the traditional definition of State vs. non-State actors. In countries or regions where the State is no longer in control (and in some cases where the State becomes a victim) and where the de-facto ‘laws’ of the group in power violate fundamental human rights, then such group becomes accountable only to the international community. Acts of ‘Intolerance’ are understood to remain under the full control and responsibility of the State.

We distinguish the following types of perpetrator:

- a) The State** (whether federal, regional or, municipal)
- b) Local non-State actors** moved by “religious nationalism” (including violent religious leaders, land-grabbing mobs, supremacist religious groups, and local branches of groups like the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan, Boko Haram in Nigeria, etc.),

c) Multinational criminal or terrorist organizations (such as the so-called Islamic State, Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabab, Boko Haram in Cameroon, etc.).

6. Trends over the period covered and Prospects for the next two years:

In our final report we have indicated ‘Deteriorated’, ‘Improved’ or ‘No Change’ in each country in the categories ‘Discrimination’ and ‘Persecution’ but not in the category ‘Intolerance’ because of the sheer volume of incidents that could be interpreted as such. The estimation of prospects is based on the incidents cited and other information obtained by the author.

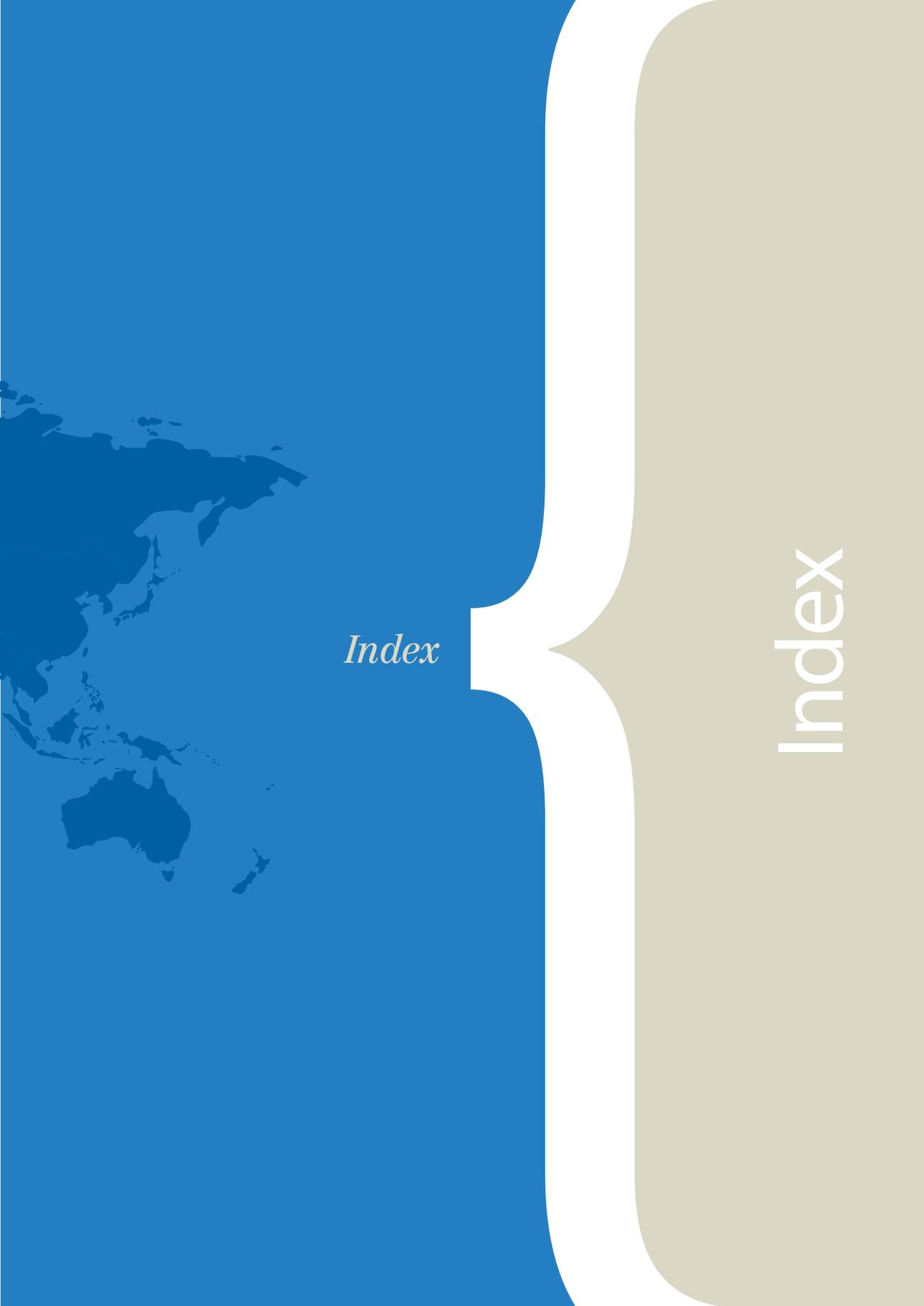
A grid to help distinguish between Religious ‘Intolerance’, ‘Discrimination’, ‘Persecution’, and ‘Genocide’

In any event, the incident must have a clear Religious Bias, and not be the effect of general insecurity

Category	(indicative list, as these acts are the most frequent)	Yes	No
Intolerance	Threats		
	Property damage (also representative of the religious group, not only individual)		
	Assault		
	Murder		
	Any other crime		
Discrimination	Official religion imposed		
	No conversion (consequence of official religion imposed)		
	Accusation of blasphemy possible		
	Prohibition to worship outside temples		
	No access to property (nor to repair or maintain)		
	No protection/security of property		
	No access to certain jobs		
	No access to public office		
	No access to funding		
	No access to certain type/level of education		
	No display of religious symbols		
	No right to appoint clergy		
	No observance of holidays		
	No evangelization, no materials available		
	No communication with other religious groups national and international		
No right to own media			
No right to establish and fund charitable and humanitarian institutions			
No right to conscientious objections and “reasonable accommodation” at workplace and services provision			
Persecution	Murder, mass or individual		
	Detention		
	Kidnapping, enslavement		

Category	(indicative list, as these acts are the most frequent)	Yes	No
	Forced exile		
	Expropriation of buildings, assets, funds		
	Physical assault, mutilation, battery, maiming		
	Freedom of expression severely curtailed, harsh sentences/punishments		
	Intimidation, threats		
	Damage to property		
Genocide			
	Killing members of the group		
	Causing serious bodily or mental harm		
	Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;		
	Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group		
	Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group		





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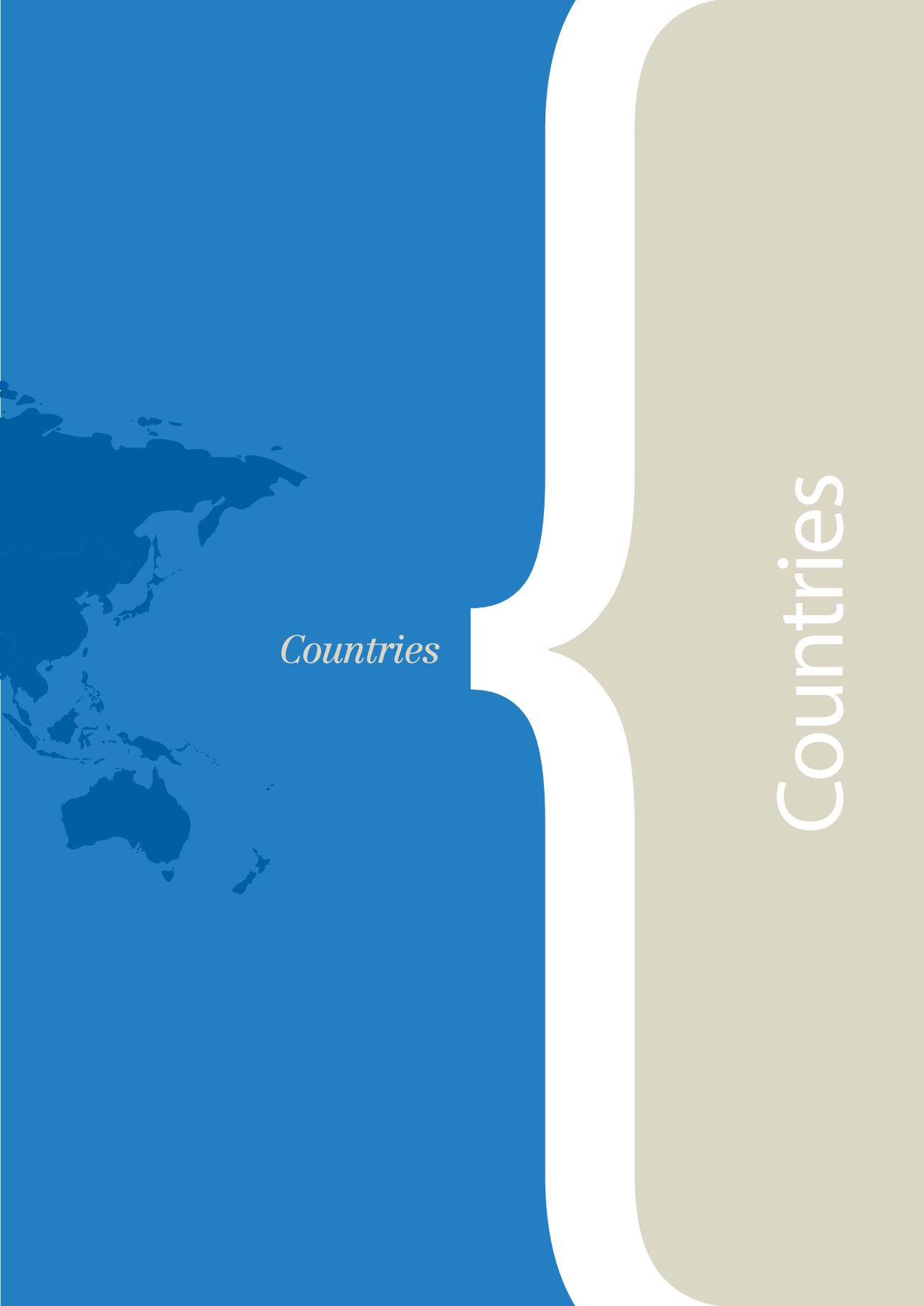
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Countries

Countries

AFGHANISTAN

RELIGION



- Muslims: 99,8%
- Others: 0,2%



AREA	POPULATION
652.864km ²	33.370.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Sunni Muslims represent up to 85 percent of the Afghan population. The rest of the population are mostly Shia Muslims, who are mainly from the ethnic Hazara group. The country's constitution officially recognises 14 ethnicities including the Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara and others.¹ The Pashtun live mainly in the south and south-east and make up the largest group (estimated 42 percent of the population), followed by Tajik (about 27 percent) who live in the north and north-east of the country.²

Regarding country's tiny non-Muslim community, the National Council of Hindus and Sikhs, an NGO, reported in December 2016 that there were fewer than 200 families, or about 900 individuals, from these two communities left in the country. No reliable estimates regarding other faith groups including Christians and Bahai are available because they do not openly practise their religion. By the end of the twentieth century, Afghanistan's small Jewish community had emigrated to Israel and the United States. Reportedly, only one Jew remained in the country.³

Article 62 of Afghanistan's constitution declares the country to be an Islamic republic. The country's president and vice-president are required to be Muslim. Article two grants non-Muslim believers the right to exercise freely their religion within the law. Article three states that "no law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan". A number of governmental laws as well as local traditions restrict the freedom of minority religions. Blasphemy in Afghanistan includes anti-Islamic writings or speech. Crimes of this nature are considered a capital offence, according to the courts' interpretation of Islamic Shari'a law. The death penalty is applicable in such cases, provided the accused does not recant within three days. Islamic religious education is mandatory in state-run and private schools.

Those who convert from Islam to another religion are considered to have committed apostasy, "according to the Hanafi [Sunni Muslim] school of jurisprudence applicable in the courts."⁴ Again, mercy is shown if a person recants within three days. However, if the individual fails to do so, "then he or she shall be subject to the punishment for apostasy"⁵

The convert may be killed, imprisoned or have property confiscated in accordance with the Sunni-Hanafi code of law.

Hindus and Sikhs were granted representation in parliament in 2016. Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani has taken steps to empower these communities and find them employment. Despite being allowed to practise their faith in public places of worship and being represented in parliament through presidential appointments, Hindu and Sikh communities are unable to carry out their religious funeral rites, as there are no crematoria in the country. The National Council of Hindus and Sikhs stated that whenever ceremonies taken place in residential areas, conflict with the neighbourhood's Muslim community has arisen.⁶

Although there are no explicit restrictions on religious minority groups' ability to establish places of worship or to train clergy, in reality there are very few places of worship for the country's minority religions. There are no public Christian churches. Coalition military facilities and embassies offer places of worship for non-Afghanis.⁷

Christianity is seen as a western religion and alien to Afghanistan. For security reasons, the remaining Hindu and Christian families celebrate their holy days in private. A decade of military control by international forces added to the general mistrust towards Christians. Public opinion concerning Christians proselytising Muslims is openly hostile.⁸ Afghan Christians worship alone or in small groups in private homes. According to Christian mission organisations, small underground house churches can be found throughout the country, each one with fewer than 10 members. Despite a constitutional promise of religious tolerance, those who are openly Christian or convert from Islam to Christianity, remain vulnerable.⁹

The Catholic Church is present in Afghanistan in the form of a 'sui iuris' missions based in the Italian embassy in Kabul. 'Sui iuris' missions are territories which do not form part of any order, vicariate or apostolic prefecture. Its first superior, the Italian Barnabite priest Father Giuseppe Moretti, retired in November 2014. His successor, the Italian Barnabite priest Father Giovanni Scalese, was installed in January 2015.¹⁰ As for religious congregations, there are three Little Sisters of Jesus engaged in public health service. Five Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity founded by Mother Teresa are serving orphans and disabled children and three Sisters of the inter-congregational community Pro Bambini di Kabul are providing education for orphans and disabled children.¹¹

Regarding the Bahai community in Afghanistan, there is little data available. The community has lived in relative anonymity. This follows the 2007 declaration by the General Directorate of Fatwas and Accounts of the Supreme Court of Afghanistan which pronounced that the Bahai faith is blasphemous and that its followers are infidels.

Registration and voting for the October 2018 parliamentary elections, due in October 2018, was scheduled to be held in schools, health facilities and places of worship. Extremists, opposed to the government, were thought likely to carry out attacks during the elections. Since voter registration for the upcoming parliamentary elections began on 14 April, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has – at the time of writing – verified 23 election-related security incidents. These have resulted in 86 civilian deaths and 185 injured – the majority of whom were women and children¹² – and the abduction of 26 civilians.

Sunni extremists targeted Shia “apostates” in bomb attacks in Shia-populated neighbourhoods. This included a blast in April 2018 at a voter registration centre in Kabul, which killed 57 people.

Regarding Daesh (ISIS)-affiliated, Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) activities in the country, the US State Department’s 2017 Religious Freedom Report states: “The ISKP accused the country’s Shia Muslims of joining militias fighting against the ISKP in Syria and Iraq to justify its attacks. The ISKP also accused the country’s Shia of being pro-government and targeted security and military personnel worshipping in Shia mosques.”

After the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, historically disadvantaged ethnic and religious minority groups, particularly Shia, have been able to hold prominent positions in the public and private sectors. There are now thought to be more than 10,000 Shia mosques in the country. Shia Muslims’ socio-political ascendance has been one of the reasons extremist groups continue to target Shia Muslims whom they consider to be apostates and “worthy of killing.”¹³ Referring to the extremism in the Middle East, the former US Secretary of State John Kerry in March 2016 said: “The fact is that [Daesh(ISIS)] kills Christians because they are Christians; Yazidis because they are Yazidis; Shia because they are Shia.”

Militias, former Taliban leaders, some returnees from Syria and groups affiliated with Daesh in Afghanistan including ISKP continue to attack Shia mosques and neighbourhoods. This situation has increased Daesh’s imprint in Afghanistan, which operates under the name Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP). It has attacked major Shia mosques including the Al Zahra Mosque in Kabul and the Imam Mohammad Baqir Mosque in the city of Herat.¹⁴

Incidents

From January 2016 to November 2017, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented 51 attacks – including targeted killings, abductions, and intimidation – against people and places of worship in attacks associated with religious freedom violations. During this period, these incidents resulted in 850 civilian casualties (273 killed and 577 injured). This is nearly double the number of civilian casualties recorded in such attacks during the entire previous seven-year period from 2009 to 2015.¹⁵

In a retaliation act for the Afghan government’s detention of a local Taliban leader, 17 Hazara Shia Muslims were abducted by the Taliban in June 2016; they were later released. In July 2016 two Daesh suicide bombers targeted a protest by Hazara Shia Muslims in Kabul, killing at least 80 people and injuring more than 400 others.

On 11th and 12th October 2016, in two separate attacks, the Shia community were targeted during Ashura – a day of fasting marking Noah leaving the Ark as well as God guiding Moses in overcoming the Egyptians. Daesh claimed responsibility. During the first attack at the Karte Shrine in Kabul, at least 19 people were killed and dozens injured. The next day, a bomb was detonated at a mosque in Khoja Gholak, Balkh Province, resulting in 14 deaths and 30 injuries. Most of the victims were children.

That same month, Daesh abducted and killed 30 civilians from the predominately Shia area of Ghor Province.

In November 2016, another Daesh suicide bomber in Kabul killed at least 32 worshippers and injured more than 50 others as the Shia community observed the religious ceremony of Arba'een, which is held 40 days after Ashura.¹⁶

On 20th October 2017, a ISKP suicide attacker killed 57 worshippers and injured another 55 people including women and children when a grenade was thrown into the women's section of an Imam-e-Zaman Shia mosque in Kabul city. The attacker then detonated his suicide vest inside the mosque.¹⁷

In December 2017, the ISKP carried out an attack against the Shia-populated Tabayan Social and Cultural Center in Kabul, leaving 41 people dead. At least seven attacks against Shia Muslims reportedly took place in 2017, resulting in the deaths of nearly 150 people, with 300 wounded. Such attacks often coincide with Shia religious festivals such as Lailat-Ul-Qadir, Ashura, Muharram, or Hazrat Mahdi's birthday.¹⁸

In 2017, 13 Hazara Shia coal mine workers were killed for their faith and ISKP beheaded three Hazara Shia Muslims.

In April 2018, militants targeted the Shia "apostates", including those gathering at a voter registration centre in the capital Kabul. 57 people were killed, among them 22 women and eight children and more than 100 wounded. Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement released by its Amaq news agency.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Religious freedom is guaranteed by the constitution but in practice life for non-Muslims in Afghanistan is very difficult because the country's accentuation of Islam in effect marginalises and excludes other faiths. This is evident not least in the country's laws. A small improvement can be seen over the period under review for some religious minorities, but the overall situation is of great concern. Of key concern is the constant rise in violence, with militant Sunni groups targeting Shia places of worship and clerics. At the time of writing, an increase in terrorist acts was predicted during the October 2018 parliamentary elections. Also of concern is the de facto ban on conversion from Islam with potentially severe penalties. In response to attacks by extremist Sunni groups, the Afghan government has attempted to provide additional security and offered weapons to civilians living near Shia mosques. By targeting the community's mosques during religious celebrations, militants are trying to prevent Shia Hazaras from practising their faith freely.

There has been an increase in attacks on progressive faith leaders in Afghanistan, especially those working in inter-faith commissions and gatherings of tribal and Muslim leaders. Several governmental and non-governmental organisations have put in place initiatives to bridge the divide between Shia and Sunni Muslims but those attending events of this nature were targeted with greater frequency in 2017 than in previous years.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan note that there were 11 attacks on religious leaders in the first half of 2017, up from two in the whole of 2016. This upward trend points to the increasing clash between Sunni and Shia Muslims and the general instability in the country of which religious differences are a key part.

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ALBANIA

RELIGION



- Muslims: 60,8%
- Christians: 36,5%
- Agnostics: 2,4%
- Others: 0,3%



ALBANIA

AREA	POPULATION
28.748km ²	2.904.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Albania's constitution, adopted in October 1998, declares the republic to be a secular state which "observes the freedom of religious beliefs and creates conditions to exercise it". Article 24 confirms: "Everyone is free to choose or change his religion or belief, as well as to express them individually or collectively, in public or in private life through cult, education... or the performance of rituals."¹ Article 18 prohibits discrimination on religious grounds.² Destruction or damage of religious objects and prevention of religious ceremonies are punishable offences.

Some Albanians self-identify as belonging to ethnic groups directly linked in some cases to a particular religion. According to the 2011 census, these ethnic groups are: Albanians 82.58 percent, Greeks 0.87 percent, Romani 0.3 percent, Vlachs 0.3 percent, Macedonians 0.2 percent, Balkan Egyptians 0.12 percent, other 15.63 percent.³

The government does not require registration or licensing of religious groups.

The State Committee on Cults, founded in September 1999, regulates relations between the state and religious communities. The committee keeps records and statistics of foreign religious organisations which contact it for assistance. In addition, religious groups may acquire the official status of a juridical body. This can be done by registering with the Tirana District Court under the Law on Nonprofit Organisations, which recognises the status of a non-profit association regardless of whether the organisation has a cultural, religious, or humanitarian character.⁴

The Committee on Cults lists a total of 245 religious groups, organisations and foundations that include the nation's four traditional religions – two Muslim (Sunni and Bektashi) and two Christian (Roman Catholic and the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania). Other groups present include various Protestant denominations, as well as Bahai's, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and a small Jewish community.

The government has separate bilateral agreements with the Roman Catholic Church, the Albanian Islamic Community, the Albanian Orthodox Church, the World Bektashi and the Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania, a Protestant umbrella organisation.

The law prohibits religious instruction in public schools.

According to official figures, religious groups run 103 educational institutions through affiliated associations and foundations. These schools must be licensed by the Ministry of Education and Sport. Catholic and Muslim groups operate numerous state-licensed schools. The Orthodox Church operates licensed religious schools and a university.

In October 2016 the Parliament of Albania passed a resolution condemning crimes carried out by the former communist regime against religious individuals. The Agency for the Restitution and Compensation of Property was founded to grapple with religious estate issues. The agency delivered property certificates for hundreds of religious buildings. However, the restitution of properties belonging to religious groups has not been completed. The government allocated EUR€740,000 to the five official religious communities in April 2017. The electricity fee for religious buildings was lowered.⁴

Muslims in Albania are divided into two communities: those who adhere to a moderate form of Sunni Islam and those who adhere to the Bektashi School (a particularly liberal form of Shia Sufism). Bektashi Sufis, with two million followers in Albania, are the only indigenous Shia Muslims in Europe (except for some Turkish Shia in a small area of Turkey). The Bektashis do not require women to wear veils. They allow women in Khabes (equivalent of church or mosque), and do not pray in Arabic. The Holy See of World Bektashism is established in Albania.

Christianity in Albania was introduced in the 1st century. The remains of many Paleochristian churches, dating to the earliest times of Christianity can be found across the country. At the time of the Turkish invasion at the end of the 15th century, northern Albania was overwhelmingly Catholic, while mid and southern Albania were mainly Orthodox.

The communist revolution of 1945 marked the beginning of extreme persecution of all religious groups. Albania became the first officially atheist country in the world in 1967. Its ruler, Enver Hoxha, ordered all religious edifices including 2,169 churches, mosques, and monasteries to be demolished or converted into sports arenas, warehouses or other secular facilities. About 300 clergymen were condemned to death, to prison or to deportation. Until communism collapsed in 1991, public expressions of faith were banned.⁵

The religious and intellectual leaders of the Albanian Catholic community were wiped out. Of the seven bishops and 200 priests and nuns in Albania before the communist takeover, only one bishop and 30 priests and nuns were found alive when the communist regime ended. After the fall of Communism, the Catholic Church had to restart its mission almost from scratch. A few new churches have been built and parishes and dioceses established. Seminaries have opened. St John Paul II made a one-day visit to the country in 1993, during which he ordained four bishops. The first Albanian cardinal

was named in 1994. In April 2016 Pope Francis recognised 38 Albanian martyrs killed during the Communist terror.

In 1992 the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania was re-established. After the fall of communism, 250 Orthodox churches were built or re-opened. 100 local priests were ordained.

The Evangelical community has about 3,000 members in 160 churches of all denominations, including Baptist, Brethren, and Lutheran.

Relations between Albanian Muslims and Christians have generally been good. Members of small and culturally-isolated faith groups find national unity more important than religious differences. In Tirana, the capital city, Muslims and Christians share a common cemetery.

In November 2016, 20,000 Albanians and their guests attended Mass in Shkoder Shen Shtjefni Cathedral to witness the beatification of 38 Catholics who were persecuted and died under Enver Hoxha's regime. The martyrs' beatification process was begun in 2002 and was completed in 2010. Pope Francis signed a decree that authorised the beatification to take place on 5th November 2016.⁶

In December 2017, the President Ilir Meta of Albania granted Albanian citizenship to Archbishop Anastasios, head of the Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church (AOAC). In his letter, the president stressed the great contribution of the archbishop "for the complete canonical and spiritual revival of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania".⁷

In January 2015 the leaders of the four main religions in Albania – the head of the Muslim Community, the head of the Orthodox Church, the leader of the Bektashi Muslims and the head of the Catholic Church, walked side by side in Paris, France, in support of the Charlie Hebdo victims.⁸

According to an Albanian Institute of Democracy study conducted in 2017, 73 percent Albanians believe in religious institutions more than anything else.⁹

Incidents

Research suggested there were no incidents of significance to the topic under review during the two-year reporting period.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Religious tolerance between the Islamic Community and the Orthodox and Catholic Churches remains one of the central pillars of stability within Albanian society. However, lack of education, poverty and unemployment of young people provide fertile ground for Islamist ideological indoctrination.

That said, Turkey's growing economic and cultural influence in Albania may have significant impact on inter-religious relations in the near future. The EUR 30 million construction project of the biggest mosque in the Balkans, to be built in Tirana city centre is the most visible sign of increasing Turkish ambition in this country. It remains to be seen whether the growing Turkish interest in Albania will prevail over EU membership goals and whether the geopolitical stakes will affect freedom of religion in this Balkan country.

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ALGERIA

RELIGION



- Muslims: 98,5%
- Agnostics: 1,3%
- Christians: 0,2%



ALGERIA

AREA	POPULATION
2.381.741km ²	40.376.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The vast majority of people in Algeria are Sunni Muslims. There is a group of several hundred local Jews.

Officially, almost all Christians are foreigners; many come from sub-Saharan Africa. There are Catholic and Protestant communities in the country. The Catholic Church is the largest Christian community and is organised into four dioceses. There are also Evangelical communities, especially in the Kabyle region. The number of Muslim citizens who convert to Christianity is small and, among them, the majority join Evangelical communities.

The preamble of Algeria's constitution describes Islam as being a fundamental component of the country's identity.¹ According to article 2, Islam is the religion of the state.² Article 10 prohibits state institutions from doing anything against Islamic morality.³

Article 87 specifies that only a Muslim can become president.⁴ Algerian law does not include a criminal offense of apostasy.

Offences related to religion include article 144 (2) of the penal code, which provides that any individual who insults the Prophet Mohammed or denigrates the creed or prophets of Islam through writing, drawing, declaration, or any other means, will receive three to five years in prison, and/or be subject to a fine of between 50,000 and 100,000 Algerian dinars⁴ (between about US\$450 and US\$900).

In addition, although Algeria permits religious organisations to participate in humanitarian work, it makes proselytising by non-Muslims an offence punishable by a fine and up to five years' imprisonment for anyone "who incites, constrains, or utilizes means of seduction tending to convert a Muslim to another religion; or by using to this end establishments of teaching, education, health, social, culture, training ... or any financial means".⁶

In 2006 President Abdelaziz Bouteflika issued Ordinance 06/03 which regulates non-Muslim religious worship. The ordinance forbids attempts to convert a Muslim to another religion or even to "shake the faith of a Muslim", although it does not forbid conversion as such. Under the ordinance, Algerians can be fined up to one million dinars and sentenced to five years in prison for printing, storing or distributing materials intended to convert

Muslims.⁷ Christian books and manuals are therefore rare in the country, and Christians do not feel free to carry Christian literature with them.

All religious groups have to register with the Ministry of Interior before conducting any activities and may gather at state-approved locations only.

Matters of family law are regulated by Shari'a law. According to the Family code, a Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman if she belongs to a monotheistic faith. Muslim women cannot marry non-Muslim men unless the man converts to Islam.⁸ Children born to a Muslim father are considered Muslims without regard to the mother's faith.

Incidents

Algeria was ranked 42nd in the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.⁹

On 8th March 2018, two brothers, who had been arrested in March 2015 for carrying Bibles, were sentenced at their appeal hearing to suspended sentences of three months each and a 100,000 dinar fine (about \$900).¹⁰

On 2nd March 2018, a church that had been running for over six years had to close after receiving an official notification. In the three preceding months, three EPA-affiliated¹¹ churches in the region of Oran were also forced to close.¹²

In December 2017, Louis Martinez of the French Reformed Church was deported upon arrival at Oran's airport. Although no official reasons were given, it was reported that "Algerian church leaders note that this deportation is consistent with a wider pattern of denial of visas for church visitors, which seems to be part of a policy whereby the Algerian authorities are restricting the ability of Algerian churches to partner with outside entities".¹³

In July 2017, a Christian convert from Islam, Slimane Bouhafis, received a partial Presidential pardon. He had been arrested in July 2016 and had been accused of "insulting Islam and the prophet Muhammad" in his social media posts. On the occasion of the 55th anniversary of Algeria's independence, Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika reduced his sentence by 16 months.¹⁴

In September 2017, Mohamed Fali, the head of the country's tiny Ahmadiyya community was found guilty of "offending Islam" and was given a six-month suspended sentence, according to his lawyer, Salah Dabouz.¹⁵

There are believed to be about 2,000 Ahmadi Muslims in Algeria. They are considered heretics and have recently been victims of a crackdown by Algerian authorities.¹⁶

The Minister of Religious Affairs, Mohamed Aissa,¹⁷ has stated on more than one occasion that the Ahmadi Muslims in Algeria are manipulated by "a foreign hand" and has accused their leaders of collusion with Israel.¹⁸ He has also said that their presence is part of a "deliberate sectarian invasion" and indicated that the Government aims to "stop deviation

from religious precepts". In a television interview in February 2017, he stated that Ahmadi Muslims are damaging the very basis of Islam.¹⁹

Prospects for freedom of religion

Ordinance 06/03 remains a matter of concern. An opportunity was missed when the constitution was revised in February 2016. Article 2, which states that Islam is the religion of the State, was not amended.²⁰ The President supported an amendment to article 36 which arguably would have explicitly guaranteed the right to freedom of religion and the right not to practise any religion. However, this amendment was blocked because of opposition from conservative Muslims.²¹

Algerian Catholic Archbishop Paul Desfarges said, with reference to foreigners, that Christians in Algeria can practise their religion in freedom ("en toute liberté"). As for Muslim converts to Christianity, things are different. According to Monsignor Desfarges, they do not fear physical threats but are worried about social pressure and may face disadvantages when it comes to the inheritance of property. The Catholic Church is critical of the law criminalising proselytism. Monsignor Desfarges also complained about the slow process of granting visas to non-Muslim religious workers.²²

There is a concern about Daesh in neighbouring Libya and other Islamist groups operating in the country. Their presence has a negative effect on security in Algeria and increases religious tensions.²³

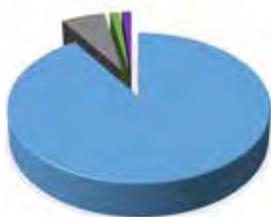
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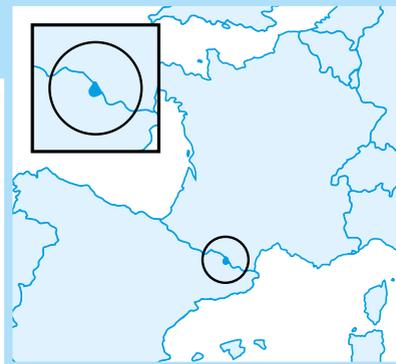
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ANDORRA

RELIGION



- Christians: 90,8%
- Agnostics: 6,4%
- Muslims: 1,4%
- Others: 1,4%



ANDORRA

AREA
468km²

POPULATION
69.200

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Andorra is a parliamentary democracy, which has two princes as its heads of state. The two princes are the President of France and the Bishop of Urgell, whose diocese is located in Spain.¹

The constitution of Andorra guarantees freedom of religion and provides that “freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in the interests of public safety, order, health or morals, or for the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.”²

The constitution acknowledges a special relationship with the Catholic Church, “in accordance with Andorran tradition” and “recognises the full legal capacity of the bodies of the Roman Catholic Church which have legal status in accordance with their own rules”.³ The concordat of 2008 regulates relations with the Catholic Church.

The constitution provides that all persons are equal before the law and that discrimination on the grounds of religion is prohibited.⁴

As a result of its religious status, the Catholic Church has some privileges not available to other religious groups. For instance, the government paid the salaries of foreign Catholic priests serving in local churches. However, migrants who performed religious functions for non-Catholic groups were unable to obtain religious working permits and had to enter Andorra with a different immigration status.⁵

In a report published on 22nd May 2012 the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of the Council of Europe recommended that Andorra should make certain changes to protect religious minorities. It was recommended that the country should address the lack of cemeteries for Jewish and Muslim communities in the country, create a special status for minority religions as religions (and not merely “cultural organisations”), improve public information about minority religions in Andorra, and authorise the building of a mosque for the Muslim community.⁶

In a follow-up report published on 9th June 2015, the ECRI did not revisit any of these recommendations or state whether or not they had been addressed.⁷ On 14th September

2015, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe published its periodic review of Andorra. It did not note any specific concerns regarding the position of religious minorities.⁸

Ten religious communities make up a body known as the Interfaith Dialogue Group. The Andorran National Commission for UNESCO collaborated with the group, which met periodically to discuss issues of common interest regarding religious traditions, beliefs, and tolerance.⁹

Incidents

In the period analysed there have been no reported incidents of violations of religious freedom in Andorra. The absence of Jewish and Muslim cemeteries remains an unresolved issue. Some time ago, representatives of these communities initiated discussions with the government about the construction of cemeteries where they could bury their dead according to their own traditions and customs. Although these communities are allowed to use existing cemeteries, there is no separate or prominent area for them. As a result, most choose to bury their dead outside the country.¹⁰

Members of the Muslim community have raised concerns that religious head coverings have to be removed for photographs for official documents.¹¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

The 2017 report of the ECRI on Andorra noted that the country had made progress in combatting discrimination by making relevant amendments to its criminal code and by addressing the issue through public education. However, there are calls for the creation of a specialised national body to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance. The lack of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation has also been identified as a flaw in the country's legislative framework which, if addressed, might further protect the right to freedom of religion.¹²

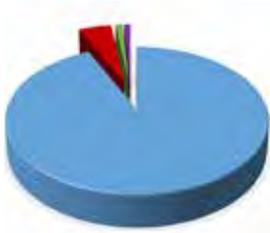
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ANGOLA

RELIGION



- Christians: 93,2%
- Ethnoreligionists: 4,8%
- Muslims: 1,1%
- Others: 0,9%



AREA	POPULATION
1.246.700km ²	25.831.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution of 2010 and other laws and policies protect religious freedom in Angola, which is defined as a secular state. The constitution respects the principle of separation between religion and state and acknowledges that religious denominations shall be respected. Article 10 (section 2) affirms that: "The state shall recognise and respect the different religious faiths, which shall be free to organise and exercise their activities, provided that they abide by the constitution and the laws of the Republic of Angola."¹ The state also guarantees protection to "churches and faiths, and their places and objects of worship, provided that they do not threaten the constitution and public order" (article 10, section 3). Article 41 also provides for freedom of conscience, religion and worship, and recognises the right to conscientious objection. Finally, this article states that "no authority shall question anyone with regard to their convictions or religious practices, except to gather statistical data that cannot be individually identified" (article 41, section 4).

Law No. 2 of 2004 requires that all religious groups apply for legal status with the Ministries of Justice and Culture. One of the requirements is a minimum membership of 100,000 people and a presence in at least 12 of the country's 18 provinces. This policy has resulted in a de facto denial of official recognition to some religious minority groups, including Muslims, and some small Evangelical churches, which, however, can perform public acts of worship.²

Only officially-registered groups are entitled to have their own schools and places of worship.

The government observes Good Friday and Christmas as religious holy days.

The Churches have full freedom to evangelise, give catechesis and operate radio stations and print media. During the last few years, some religious minority groups have complained that the Catholic Church is favoured by government officials under the ruling MPLA.³

Incidents

In January 2018, the new president, João Lourenço, authorised the Catholic 'Radio Ecclesia' to broadcast countrywide. Up to that date, this radio station was allowed to broadcast only in the capital, Luanda. The spokesman of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Angola, Monsignor José Manuel Imbaba, hailed the decision as "the end of a great injustice" and congratulated the President for "his political courage".⁴

During the reporting period, Muslims continued to complain of what they describe as unfair treatment and discrimination, including the deportation of Muslim immigrants from West African countries. The authorities denied such allegations, noting that they only took measures to enforce national security laws against the threat of Islamic extremism to the country and to implement the government's strict immigration policies.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants noted in his 2017 Report on Angola that "Major cultural differences between Angolans and their West African counterparts have resulted in a negative image of people of the Muslim faith. [. . .] [T]he Government is yet to publicly respond to help quell the concerns of its citizens about practising Muslims and the need to embrace diversity within society. [. . .] [I]n some instances, it is public officials who use negative language when referring to migrants and incite fear of those of Muslim faith".⁵

Prospects for freedom of religion

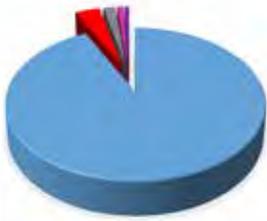
Angola held its last general election in August 2017. Ahead of the vote, President José Eduardo Dos Santos retired after 40 years. He was replaced by the new MPLA candidate, João Lourenço. During his first months in office, the latter announced that his policies would include respect for the rule of law and for basic human rights. The right to freedom of religion is upheld in many respects but the unclear status of Muslims and other smaller denominations remains an open question. Although they do not suffer open persecution, their situation is still a cause for concern with respect to religious freedom.

Endnotes

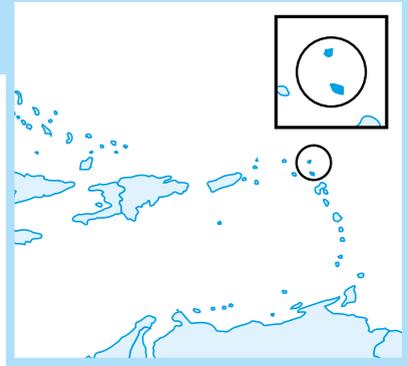
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ANTIGUA & BARBUDA

RELIGION



- Christians: 92,8%
- Spiritists: 3,7%
- Agnostics: 1,8%
- Baha'is: 1%
- Others: 0,7%



AREA
442km²

POPULATION
92.700

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the constitution states that Antigua and Barbuda is a sovereign nation that acknowledges “the supremacy of God, the dignity and worth of the human person” and “the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual.”¹

Under article 3, everyone has the right to the protection of their fundamental human rights and freedoms without distinction of race, place of origin, opinions or political affiliations, colour, creed or sex; such rights include – among others – freedom of conscience, expression, peaceful assembly and association, subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the public interest.

Conscientious objection to military service is recognised under article 6.

According to article 11, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of their freedom of conscience, which includes freedom of thought and religion, freedom to change one's religion or belief, to manifest it and propagate it through worship, teaching, practice and observance, either individually or collectively, in public or in private.

Except with one's consent or that of a parent or guardian in case of minors under the age of 18, no one attending an educational establishment is required to receive religious instruction, nor take part in religious services or attend religious ceremonies other than those of the religion they profess (article 11).

No person shall be required to take an oath against their beliefs or in a manner that is contrary to their religion or belief (article 11).

No law may be discriminatory in itself or in its effects, where discrimination means different treatment of people by reason of their race, place of origin, political opinion or affiliation, colour, creed or sex (article 14).

Being a minister of religion is an impediment to appointment to the Senate (article 30) or election to the House (article 39).

Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost Monday and Christmas are public holidays.²

Public schools do not allow religious instruction. Private schools can provide religious instruction. Religious groups must register with the government in order to receive tax exemptions and to have the right to own, build or renovate properties. The law prohibits the use of marijuana, even for religious purposes.³

Incidents

In October 2016, an opinion piece⁴ criticised a pastor (who claimed to be a former lesbian and activist) for saying that Christian-based companies should be able to reject LGBT job applicants, describing her group as bigoted and homophobic.

In October 2016, Dr Tennyson Joseph, who teaches at the Political Science Department of the University of the West Indies (UWI), Cave Hill Campus, criticised what he calls the “tyranny of the majority”, i.e. the imposition of Christian teachings in public schools. He believes that religious education should be left to the private sphere. He pointed out that, in modern democracies, the Church is separate from the state, so religion should not be taught in schools but in the family.⁵

Prospects for freedom of religion

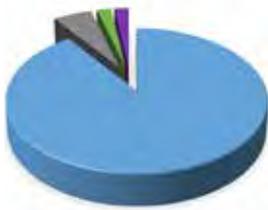
In the period under review, there were no incidents of intolerance but there is an ongoing debate around the limits to religious freedom. There is no reason to believe that there will be any change in terms of freedom of religion.

Endnotes

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ARGENTINA

RELIGION



- Christians: 90,2%
- Agnostics: 5,6%
- Muslims: 2,1%
- Others: 2,1%



AREA	POPULATION
2.800.000km ²	43.847.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the Argentinian constitution¹ invokes the protection of God as the source of all reason and justice. Article two states that the federal government supports the Catholic faith. According to article 14 of the constitution, all inhabitants may freely profess their beliefs. Clergy cannot be members of Congress, as set out in article 73. Congress is tasked, under article 75 (22), with presiding over proposed treaties with other countries, international organisations and concordats with the Holy See.

Article 93 of the constitution states that, on assuming office, the president and vice-president must take an oath consistent with their religious beliefs.

An agreement between Argentina and the Holy See, dating from 1966,² declares that the Argentine state recognises the Catholic Church and its activities in the country. There is also a concordat with the Holy See on military jurisdiction and religious pastoral help for those in the armed forces.³

State money is allocated to certain Catholic clergy and there is funding to help train diocesan clergy. Seminarians from some religious congregations also receive financial assistance.⁴

Under article 126b of the country's education law, students' freedom of conscience must be respected. Article 128c grants parents the right to take into account their religious beliefs when choosing schools and colleges for their children.⁵

According to article 46c of the National Civil and Commercial Code, the Catholic Church is a public legal entity and article 147 states that the Church is governed by its own legal structures. Other churches, confessions or religious entities are, according to article 148e, private legal entities, governed by their own rules as well as the Civil and Commercial Code, and statutes.⁶

To obtain legal recognition, religious organisations other than the Catholic Church must register with the National Registry of Beliefs.⁷

Under article 17 of the labour law, religious discrimination against workers is not allowed and, according to article 73,

no employer has the right to enquire about a worker's religious views.⁸

Certain Catholic feast days are statutory holidays. Some holy days for people who profess other religions such as Judaism or Islam can be treated as non-working days.⁹

Clergy have the right to discretion concerning information gleaned through their religious status.¹⁰

Under article 80 of the Penal Code of Argentina, murder is punishable by life imprisonment, and this includes if religious motives are involved. According to article 119b, with regard to sexual abuse crimes, the punishment is more severe if the perpetrator is a member of the clergy.¹¹

Incidents

In July 2016 a court in Buenos Aires ordered the city government to allow Catholic clergy and other faith leaders to provide spiritual assistance in the city's hospitals and other public institutes. A final ruling in this case is still pending.¹²

In 2016 there was a court case concerning a resolution by the Chamber of Deputies to place an image of the Virgin of Luján in the chamber, a decision which sparked criticism on grounds that the move would go against the state's religious neutrality. In July of that year, a court denied the request to overturn the deputies' resolution, stating that the country's secular nature guaranteed religious plurality.¹³

In August 2016 members of the Argentine Council for Religious Freedom spoke at a forum on inter-faith dialogue organised by the General Religion Office of the City of Buenos Aires.¹⁴

In October 2016 the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Argentina, together with the Holy See, announced they had finished cataloguing and digitising the archive material from the country's military dictatorship. It was stated that the catalogue would be available to the regime's victims and their immediate families. In the case of clergy and religious, access would be granted to their religious superiors.¹⁵

The General Secretariat of the Presidency declared in October 2016 that activities scheduled in the town of Villa Cura Brochero, Córdoba Province, for the canonisation of Father José Gabriel del Rosario Brochero, were of national interest.¹⁶

In November 2016 the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) and the Argentine Council for Religious Freedom (CALIR) organised the 2016 South American Forum for Religious Freedom and issued a declaration of shared principles and common purposes to promote freedom of religion and conscience.¹⁷

On International Women's Day in March 2017 a group of protesters gathered in front of the Cathedral of Tucumán and acted out a drama involving the Virgin Mary aborting a baby. The Archdiocese of Tucumán condemned the event saying that it offended the Virgin Mary and the faith of Catholics. That November, the National Institute against

Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism issued a statement calling the demonstration “discriminatory behaviour that constitutes an attack and an offence against Christians”.¹⁸

Also in March 2017 a memorandum of understanding was signed by the Religion Secretariat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship of the Argentine Republic and the Ministry of Local Government of San Juan Province which aimed to facilitate the registration of religious groups in the National Registry of Religion and to enhance relations with religious communities.¹⁹

In November 2017 a court in Mendoza authorised a blood transfusion to a baby whose parents are Jehovah’s Witnesses and who opposed the treatment for religious reasons. Given the life-threatening situation, the medical staff asked the courts to authorise the treatment.²⁰

That month, the Latin American Jewish Congress received the 2017 Prize for Religious Commitment awarded by the Clarín newspaper’s Religious Values supplement, in recognition of its work in promoting dialogue between the Jewish community and the rest of civil society.²¹

Also in November 2017 the date of 9th August was declared as “National Day of Interfaith Dialogue”.²²

In December 2017 the Supreme Court ruled that in Salta, religious education could not take place in public schools during school hours as part of the curriculum, and that the provincial education law was unconstitutional. This law had required schools to teach religion during regular school hours. The court also overturned a regulation requiring parents to say if they want their children to be taught religion. In April 2017 the Archbishopric issued a statement expressing its concern over the decision to eliminate religious education completely.²³

In February 2018 the Catholic Church issued a statement that it did not oppose the government’s decision to grant a debate in Congress on decriminalising abortion. However, the Church called for dialogue so that all voices, including those of Christians, could be heard. The Church also said that it did not wish to impose a religious view of the issue and that it wanted to contribute to the debate on the basis of reason. It reiterated its opposition to abortion and proposed policies for a comprehensive sexual education programme.²⁴

In February 2018 in the Sarmiento area, criminals broke into a hall used for meetings by Jehovah’s Witnesses. They trashed the place before stealing items kept there.²⁵

In March 2018 the Deputy Secretary of Worship said that state contributions to the Catholic Church are defined by the constitution and represent seven percent of what the Church manages. After this figure was revealed, left-wing deputies presented a bill to cut all subsidies to the Catholic Church and to repeal rules in the Civil and Commercial Code treating the Catholic Church as a “public legal person”.²⁶

In March 2018 the government increased budget funding for church repairs.²⁷

In April 2018, Father Guillermo Marcó, president of the Institute of Interreligious Dialogue, was named Illustrious Citizen by the City of Buenos Aires in recognition of his pastoral, inter-religious, media and social work.²⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

Fruitful inter-faith dialogue continues to develop in Argentina through various initiatives, involving congresses and activities organised by civic associations, as well as government bodies including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship and the Buenos Aires General Directorate of Worship.

In several cases, religious freedom issues have been resolved through legal proceedings. In the period under review, some reported attacks obviously involved religious freedom whereas with others the faith connection was less clear. What stands out from this period is the interest in a new law on religious freedom which would do more to protect this fundamental right. In short, there are positive signs with respect to freedom of religion, and future prospects appear positive.

Endnotes

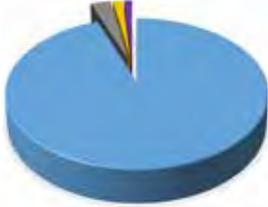
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ARMENIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 94,4%
- Agnostics: 3%
- New Religionists: 1,4%
- Others: 1,2%



AREA	POPULATION
29.743km ²	3.026.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 41 of the constitution states that “everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion”. It is stipulated that this right “shall include the freedom to change one’s religion or beliefs and the freedom, either alone or in community with others in public or in private to manifest religion or beliefs in preaching, church ceremonies, other rituals of worship or in other forms”. Under article 77, the incitement of religious hatred is prohibited.¹

Article 17 of the constitution establishes a separation between “religious organisations” and the state. However, article 18 recognises “the exclusive mission of the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) as a national church in the spiritual life, development of the national culture, and preservation of the national identity of the people of Armenia”.

Apart from the constitution, the other fundamental source of law relevant to religious liberty is the “Law of the Republic of Armenia on the Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Organisations” (1991) (LRAFCRO 1991). Section seven provides that a registered religious group may exercise the following rights: “to rally their faithful around them”; “to satisfy the religious-spiritual needs of their faithful”; “to perform religious services, rites, and ceremonies”; “to establish groups for religious instruction aimed at training members”; “to engage in theological, religious, and historical and cultural studies”; “to train members of clergy or for scientific and pedagogical purposes”; “to obtain and utilise objects of religious significance”; “to make use of news media in accordance with the law”; “to establish ties with religious organisations in other countries”; and “to get involved in charity”. On the other hand, proselytism is explicitly prohibited by section eight, if it goes beyond the activities specified in section seven.

Both the question of proselytism and the preferential treatment of the AAC have often been seen as problematic by other churches, religious organisations and NGOs within the country. While church and state are separate in Armenia, section 17 of the LRAFCRO 1991, like the constitution, gives a special status to the AAC which other religious communities do not enjoy.²

Registration is not required by law for religious groups. However, registration gives religious groups legal recognition and there are no legal provisions which set out the rights of unregistered groups. The prerequisites for registration are specified in section five of the LRAFCRO 1991. In order to register as a legal entity, a religious community must satisfy the following criteria: it must be based on “historically recognised holy scripture”; its doctrines must form part of the “international contemporary religious-ecclesiastical communities”; it must be “free from materialism and [be] intended for purely spiritual goals”; it must have at least 50 members. These registration requirements do not apply to religious organisations which are related to groups that are already recognised as national minorities.

The 2007 “Law of the Republic of Armenia regarding the relationship between the Republic of Armenia and the Holy Apostolic Armenian Church” gives the AAC the automatic right to place representatives in hospitals, orphanages, boarding schools, military units, and places of detention. Other religious groups who wish to minister in these institutions must obtain express permission from the head of the given institution.³

During the period under review, draft changes were proposed to the law on religious freedom. An early draft law was tentatively welcomed by minority religious groups and civil society organisations. There was support for the proposed amendments to the ban on proselytising and the removal of certain registration requirements for religious organisations that had been felt to be unclear. However, concerns were raised that the AAC was exempt from the draft law. A new draft was put forward in November 2017. Although the AAC was now subject to the new law, minority religious groups and civil society organisations raised fresh concerns about the proposed draft on the grounds that it would actually increase state control of religious organisations and further limit religious liberty.⁴

In March 2018, the Council of Europe evaluated the new draft law amending the LRAFCRO 1991 as a “welcome improvement”, even though objections remained. The statement issued by the Council of Europe noted that the non-mandatory character of state registration for religious organisations was not yet stated explicitly. Furthermore, it encouraged the Armenian legislature to provide objective justification for the preferential treatment of the AAC. It also argued that registration requirements for religious organisations should not be too burdensome and be brought in line with those applicable to NGOs. At the time of writing, no further changes had yet been brought into effect.⁵

Some minority Christian groups felt that their right to freedom of worship was significantly impeded by the ban on proselytising. They also tended to say that they practised their religion discreetly, refrained from public articulations of their faith and preferred to resolve disputes with public authorities and others quietly and without public confrontation.⁶

By contrast, while they have often reported incidents of harassment, the Jehovah’s Witnesses have also been prepared to voice concerns publically and to litigate in order to enforce their religious rights. In October 2017 they obtained a judgement in their favour from the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). In *Aryan and Others v. Armenia*, the

court held that four Jehovah's witnesses had been unjustly sentenced to prison for refusing to perform the alternative to military service because they objected to the fact that the only alternative service was itself under military supervision. The ECtHR ruled that Armenia had failed to provide them with a genuine alternative civilian service.⁷

Some activists, members of minority religions and NGOs felt that the AAC's right to provide teaching materials in schools had a negative impact on freedom of religion and on the respect accorded to other beliefs. Particular concern was raised about the way these materials identified membership of the AAC with true Armenian national identity. Concerns were also raised about some of the presentations of other forms of Christianity and other faiths in the standard materials on the national curriculum. It was reported that teachers of the AAC history course became more respectful of other religions after these concerns had been expressed publically, both nationally and internationally.

Incidents

Pope Francis visited the country briefly in June 2016. His speech at Yerevan caused controversy in Turkey because he acknowledged the Armenian genocide. In the Apostolic church in Etchmiadzin, he praised Armenia for becoming the first country to make Christianity the state religion (in AD 301) and for keeping the faith alive in the dark times of history. Catholicism is one of the minority forms of Christianity in Armenia. The Pope urged all Christians to unite and to prevent religion from being misused.⁹

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, in 2016 there were several cases of physical and verbal harassment of their members while they were engaging in their public ministry. However, the prevalence of this intimidation appeared to diminish in the reporting period. Although there have been a few recent instances of verbal attacks, there have been no recent physical attacks.¹⁰ Other minority religions continued to report biased and inaccurate media coverage of their existence and activities. However a slight improvement was also noted, especially in online media sources. There was also a perception that members of minority religions were expected to conform to a certain extent with the dominant form of Christianity in certain public institutions.¹¹

There is a community of around 35,000 Yazidis. They have been settled in the Armenian southern Caucasus for over 100 years. Recently, Yazidis in Iraq were specifically targeted by Daesh (ISIS) and either slaughtered or forced into sex slavery. Many Yazidis from Iraq fled to Armenia for refuge. Since January 2016 the Armenian government has contributed \$100,000 to the UNHCR to support the resettlement of Yazidis from Sinjar in northern Iraq. It is reported that "integration efforts continue to be a challenge for the authorities, balancing complaints from both [existing Armenian and newly arrived Yazidi] communities".¹² The world's largest Yazidi temple has been under construction in Armenia since 2016. The

complex, which is about 20 miles from the capital, will include a conference hall, a seminary and museum.¹³

The Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan continues to accuse the state of Armenia of wide-scale vandalism and destruction of Azeri cultural heritage in the contested territories between both countries.¹⁴ There have been meetings between religious authorities of both countries, which have been mediated by Russia.¹⁵

Prospects for freedom of religion

Several concerns about religious freedom in Armenia remain, such as the restrictions on the activities of minority religions, especially the ban on proselytising, which many relate to the dominant position of the AAC in the country. However, this issue is a subject of live public debate and there are indications of greater freedoms for religious minorities, as well as positive acts of welcome for persecuted religious minorities.

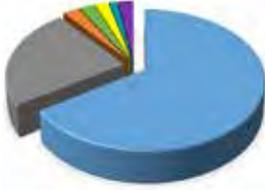
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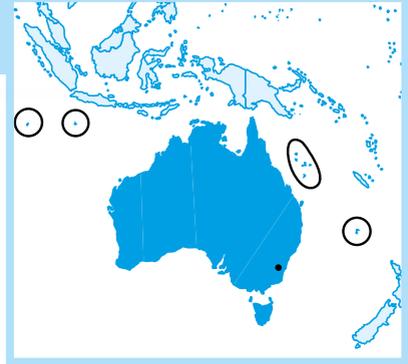
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AUSTRALIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 65,6%
- Agnostics: 23,7%
- Buddhists: 2,5%
- Muslims: 2,4%
- Atheists: 2,1%
- Hindus: 1,2%
- Others: 2,5%



AREA	POPULATION
7.692.060 km ²	24.309.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Australian constitution prohibits the government from making “any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust”.¹

Australia is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The right to religious freedom may be limited under certain circumstances, such as when necessary to protect public safety, order, and health, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.² The State of Tasmania is the only state or territory whose constitution specifically guarantees, subject to public order and morality, “freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of religion”.³

Discrimination on the basis of religion or ethno-religious background is explicitly prohibited by law in all of the eight states and territories, except South Australia. The other seven have agencies to investigate complaints of religious discrimination.⁴

In August 2016 the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly, the representative body of the federal capital of Canberra and its environs, passed an unlawful vilification law concerning religious hatred. The law criminalises incitement of “hatred toward, revulsion of, serious contempt for, or severe ridicule of a person or group of people on the ground” of religious conviction.⁵

Religious groups are not required to register with the government, but to receive tax-exempt status, non-profit religious groups must apply to the Australia Tax Office.⁶

All states and territories provide some form of religious education in public schools; with some states operating “opt-in” systems and others “opt-out” systems. In 2016, Victoria instituted a new public school “opt-in” curriculum that removed religious education but permits students to attend religion classes on school premises “for a maximum of 30 minutes per week, during lunchtime, or in the hour before or after school”.⁷

The One Nation Party won four seats in the Senate in the July 2016 federal election.⁸ The party platform included stopping Muslim immigration, banning the burqa and niqab in public, no new construction of mosques, and the monitoring of existing mosques.⁹ Party leader Pauline Hanson was criticised for wearing a burqa to the Parliament House in a stunt to support a ban on the Islamic garment. Attorney General George Brandis warned Hanson to be careful of offending the “religious sensibilities of Australians” and said, “to mock [a community’s] religious garments is an appalling thing to do.”¹⁰

In June 2016 the federal High Court denied a request to appeal against the construction of a mosque in Bendigo, Victoria, and ordered the lead applicant to pay court costs.¹¹ In 2017 the government commissioned a study into the reaction to the Bendigo mosque to understand better the divisive impact of the controversy, particularly on the Muslim community.¹²

In September 2017, three men from a far-right group were found guilty of inciting contempt and ridicule of Muslims for an October 2015 protest against the construction of the Bendigo mosque. They beheaded a dummy with a toy sword outside the Bendigo City Council offices while chanting “Allahu Akbar” (God is greatest) and spilling fake blood.¹³

According to a 2017 report, the “Jewish community is the only community within Australia whose places of worship, schools, communal organisations and community centres need, for security reasons, to operate under the protection of high fences, armed guards, metal detectors, CCTV cameras and the like. The necessity is recognised by Australia’s law enforcement agencies and arises from the entrenched and protean nature of antisemitism in western and Muslim culture, resulting in a high incidence of physical attacks against Jews and Jewish communal buildings over the last three decades, and continuing threats.”¹⁴

In November 2016 a Sydney Council retroactively approved an eruv that had been constructed a year earlier in the suburb of St. Ives. “An eruv consists of conduits positioned several metres in the air between electricity poles on public land. It enables observant members of the Jewish community to conduct activities on the Sabbath within the eruv which they would otherwise not be able to do.”¹⁵ Christian community members spoke in support of the measure, with one saying, “There is no place for exclusion, discrimination, or anti-Semitism.”¹⁶

A court upheld a local council’s ban on the construction of a new synagogue in Bondi, a suburb of Sydney in August 2017 due to fears that it would be an “unacceptable security risk” as a target of Daesh (ISIS). The head of the local Jewish community called the decision by the council and the court “unprecedented”, adding that “its implications are enormous. It basically implies that no Jewish organisation should be allowed to exist in residential areas. It stands to stifle Jewish existence and activity in Sydney and indeed, by creating a precedent, the whole of Australia, and by extension rewarding terrorism.”¹⁷ In late September 2017, modified building plans with heightened security measures were submitted to the council.

Incidents

According to a report by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) anti-Semitic incidents during the period 1st October 2016 – 30th September 2017 rose by 9.5 per cent over the previous year, mainly due to an increase in graffiti and posters. While the number of “attacks” remained stable, the “threats” increased by 39 percent.¹⁹ The ECAJ reported 230 incidents, with three physical assaults, 76 incidents of abuse, harassment or intimidation, 66 incidents of property damage, vandalism or graffiti, and a total of 85 threats in various forms.²⁰

Physical assaults included a Jewish man in a Melbourne shopping centre car park being verbally abused and then punched and thrown to the ground and a Jewish student on a bus in Sydney being insulted, spat on, kicked and punched in the chest.²¹ Abuse and harassment often occurred around synagogues and other Jewish centres and included people yelling insults and threats from cars driving by.²²

Incidents of vandalism included rocks thrown through the window of a rabbi’s home. There were several incidents of swastikas being carved into cars belonging to Jews. In August, September, and December 2016, the eruv wires in St Ives were vandalised several times,²³ and in September 2016 the glass front door of a Canberra synagogue was shattered.²⁴ A Jewish organisation’s computer system was hacked by an individual using the name “Dr Mengele” in February 2017.²⁵

In a report covering 14 months in 2014-15 (the most recent available), 243 incidents collected by the Islamophobia Register Australia were analysed. One key finding was that women wearing head coverings were the main targets of Islamophobia.²⁶ The report also noted that bystanders were reluctant to intervene, with just 25 percent of victims reporting that witnesses stepped in.²⁷

In June 2016, a car was firebombed and anti-Muslim graffiti was spray painted outside a Perth mosque while hundreds were praying inside. In the same week, another Perth mosque was vandalised with graffiti and a pig’s head was left outside its main entrance.²⁸ In July 2016, an Adelaide mosque was vandalised with graffiti reading “No Muslim” and showing Nazi symbols.²⁹

In April 2017, anti-Muslim and racist graffiti was sprayed on a fence in Bundaberg, Queensland. Community leaders responded by speaking out against intolerance and ignorance and in support of the Muslim community.³⁰ A pig’s head and a backpack with a swastika on it were left at the front gate of the Islamic College of Brisbane in July 2017.³¹

Authorities investigated arson attacks on Orthodox churches in Melbourne and Sydney in May 2016³² and arsonists destroyed two places of worship in Geelong in April and May 2016: a Presbyterian church and the main mosque in a former Christian church.³³

An activist drove a van to the doorstep of the Australian Christian Lobby’s building in Canberra and blew it up causing \$100,000 damage in December 2016. The perpetrator told police he chose the location for the bombing because he disliked the Christian Lobby over its “position on sexuality” and because “religions are failed”.³⁴

A Greek Orthodox man wearing a large crucifix was attacked in Sydney in April 2017 by four men who insulted him, ripped the crucifix from his neck and trampled on it. A Baptist minister reported that this was the fourth religiously-motivated attack against Christians he had been told about in six months.³⁵

In October 2017 during the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey, a national survey to gauge support for same-sex marriage, several churches were desecrated with graffiti such as “bash bigots” and “crucify ‘no’ voters”; despite the churches not having told parishioners how to vote in the survey.³⁶

Prospects for freedom of religion

It appears that there were no significant new or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period under review. However, there seems to be an increased risk of societal intolerance toward religions, fuelled by cultural issues such as marriage, geopolitical conflicts, and anti-immigration sentiments in Australia.

Endnotes

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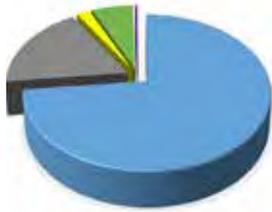
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AUSTRIA

AUSTRIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 73,2%
- Agnostics: 18%
- Atheists: 2%
- Muslims: 6,4%
- Others: 0,4%



AREA	POPULATION
83.871km ²	8.570.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Freedom of religion is a statutorily and constitutionally protected right. Past laws, treaties, conventions and modern constitutional amendments guarantee freedom of “conscience and creed” and include the right to join, leave, or abstain from any Church or religious community.¹ By its very nature, the Austrian legal system is religiously neutral. The principle of religious neutrality prohibits any identification of the state with a specific Church or religious community. For historical reasons, Austria nevertheless maintains a special relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, regulated by a concordat with the Holy See² (1933/34, supplement 1962), which includes special agreements about educational and financial issues.

The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, and public incitement to hostile acts against a Church group, religious society, or other religious group is prohibited “if perceivable by a larger number of persons”³ Further, incitement, insult, or contempt against such groups is similarly prohibited if the “action violates human dignity”. The law permits alternative service for conscientious objectors.⁴

Under the law, religious groups are divided into three categories (in descending order of status): officially recognised religious societies, religious confessional communities, and associations.⁵ Officially recognised religious societies have the right to practise public worship, to autonomous administration of their internal affairs, to found private schools (financially supported by the state) and to provide religious instruction with public funding in private and public schools. Legal recognition endows a Church or religious community with the status of a corporate body and private legal capacity.⁶ Further, recognition as a religious society includes the right to receive mandatory Church contributions by members and to bring religious workers into the country as ministers, missionaries or teachers.⁷

To be recognised as a religious society, groups must either have been recognised as such before 1998, or must have membership equalling 0.2% of the population and have been in existence for 20 years (10 of which as an organised group, and five as a “confessional community”).⁸ An exception to the membership requirement applies to the following officially recognised religious societies in Austria: the Catholic Church, the Protestant Churches

(specifically Lutheran and Presbyterian, called Augsburg and Helvetic confessions), the Islamic community, the Old Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Eastern Orthodox Churches (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the New Apostolic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Methodist Church of Austria, the Buddhist community, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Islamic-Alevi Community, and the Free Christian Churches.⁹

Religious groups not recognised as societies may seek recognition as "confessional communities". This endows them with a certain level of legal status, but without the financial, immigration, and educational benefits available to recognised religious societies. Groups must have at least 300 members and submit their governing statutes and a written description of their religious doctrine. The Office for Religious Affairs (in the Federal Chancellery) determines if a group qualifies as a confessional community.¹⁰

There are eight such confessional communities legally recognised by Austrian law: the Bahais, the Movement for Religious Renewal-Community of Christians, the Pentecostal Community of God, Seventh-day Adventists, the Hindu community, the Shia community, Old-Faith Alevis, and the Unification Church.¹¹

Religious groups that do not qualify as either societies or confessional communities may apply to become legal associations to obtain legal recognition, but do not qualify for other benefits. Examples include the Church of Scientology and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Religious instruction is mandatory until the age of 14 and is publicly funded on a proportional basis for children belonging to one of the officially recognised religious societies. Ethics courses are offered in some schools for students who opt out of religious education. Both religious and ethics instruction include explanation of the tenets of different religious groups.¹²

The Federal Agency for Sect Issues, supervised by the Federal Ministry for Women, Family and Youth, provides information and advice relating to "sects" and "cults". In various provinces, several similar "anti-sects and cults" offices also receive public funding.¹³ Some groups have criticised the agency and local organisations for fostering discrimination against unrecognised religious groups.¹⁴

The Austrian Criminal Code contains a conscience clause for medical staff with regard to abortion.¹⁵ However, pharmacists do not enjoy an explicit right to conscientious objection. Catholic Christians have objected to the rules governing pharmacists in relation to abortifacient drugs. The professional association of pharmacists holds the position that there is no such right and that pharmacies must dispense the so-called "morning after pill", which may result in an early abortion. Because there is no explicit law protecting the right of conscientious objection for pharmacists, the practical effect is that many pharmacists or employees of pharmacies do not dare to withhold the abortifacient drug for conscience reasons.¹⁶

Incidents

The Observatory on Intolerance Against Christians (OIDAC) reported 19 anti-Christian incidents in Austria, including assaults, burglaries, and vandalism of churches and public Christian statues during the reporting period.¹⁷ The cases include a 22-year-old man from Afghanistan who stabbed a Christian woman when he heard her reading the Bible at a refugee centre in Vöcklamarkt (Upper Austria).¹⁸ According to the 2016 OSCE/ODHIR (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) hate crime report (the most recent available), Austrian police still do not issue specific reports or collect records on anti-Christian hate crimes or incidents. This lack of information makes it difficult to evaluate or classify crimes with an anti-Christian bias. Civil society contributions of data for 2016 included seven attacks against Christians' property¹⁹ and at least four attacks against people, not including crimes committed in refugee shelters where the authorities generally do not collect data about their residents' religion.

According to Christian Solidarity International (CSI) and other sources, since 2015 Christian refugees have repeatedly been victims of discrimination in Austrian refugee centres. Christian refugees are often threatened and harassed by Muslim refugees along the refugee flight route and this behaviour can continue in the centres. The general secretary of CSI, Elmar Kuhn, said the Austrian state has been unable or unwilling to find a solution to this problem. He noted that even some Muslim staff of the centres participate in the harassment of Christians. It is reported that the threat is worst for converts from Islam as conversion is seen as a crime in some Islamic countries.²⁰

As in previous years, Christian politicians, academics and leaders of pro-life groups were frequently subjected to hostile speech because of their views.²¹ At a political level, a lawmaker for the Green Party in 2016 submitted a question in parliament asking the government to evaluate possible actions to stop "pro-life" workshops in religious education classes.²²

It is sometimes difficult to determine whether an attack of Muslim refugees or migrants is motivated by hostility to Muslims in particular or by a more general xenophobia.

As indicated by the most recent OSCE hate crime study, Austrian police reported 28 anti-Muslim crimes in 2016. Incidents were not divided by type of crime. Civil society contributions of data for 2016 include 20 violent attacks or threats against individual Muslims, mostly against women wearing headscarves.²³

In 2016, a state-funded study into religious education in several of the 150 Muslim kindergartens in Vienna found some links with extremist Islamist groups. The report said, "intellectual Salafists and political Islamists are the dominant groups in the Islamic kindergarten scene in Vienna". As a result, the Integration Minister proposed tighter controls to prevent the danger of "parallel societies emerging" because of "theologically-motivated isolation". The president of Vienna's Muslim community called the allegations of "Salafist" education in kindergartens "ridiculous".²⁴

A ban on full-face coverings, which includes Muslim veils and burkas, came into force in Austria in October 2017. The new law states that faces must be visible from hairline to chin in public places, arguing that a safe public life and a tolerant society demand open interaction and visibility. Austrian police are allowed to use force to make people show their face and can impose fines of €150 (US\$175).²⁵ The government continued to apply a policy of banning headwear in official identification papers, except for religious reasons, as long as the face is sufficiently visible to allow for identification of the wearer.

According to the 2016 OSCE/ODHIR hate crime study, police reported 41 anti-Semitic crimes. Incidents were not divided by type of crime. Civil society contributions of data for 2016 included four violent attacks, one threat, and four attacks against property.²⁶

The government continued to fund Holocaust education and strictly enforce laws against neo-Nazi activity, as well as the public denial, belittlement, approval, or justification of the Nazi genocide or crimes against humanity. The police continued to provide extra protection to the Vienna Jewish Community's offices, as well as Jewish schools and museums, to protect them against anti-Semitic acts, given Austria's own history of anti-Semitism.²⁷

The Forum Against anti-Semitism reported in July 2017 that the number of anti-Semitic incidents in 2016 (477) was nearly identical to that of the previous year. Some 153 of these incidents were online hate speech, which is more difficult to classify. Because online postings are generally anonymous, it was difficult to determine who had committed the offence, but according to various leaders of the Jewish Communities of Austria, there was a clear trend of increasingly hostile behaviour against the country's 15,000 Jews from Muslims.²⁸ For Ariel Muzicant, President of European Jewish Congress (EJC), "Anti-Semitism driven by Islamism is life-threatening and a danger for all Europe, not just for us".²⁹

Prospects for freedom of religion

In the reporting period, there was no notable change to the situation of religious freedom in Austria, but some trends signal negative prospects. While there were no significant increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom, there appears to be an increased risk of societal intolerance against both majority and minority religions. Some of these tensions may be a backlash against global terrorism or be attributable to hostility towards immigrants or refugees, rather than having a specifically religious motive. They may also derive in part from more radical forms of secularism in western Europe. The relatively new phenomenon of bullying and physical threats against Christian refugees by other asylum seekers is still of concern.³⁰

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AZERBAIJAN

RELIGION



● Muslims: 95.2%
● Christians: 3.2%
● Agnostics: 1.3%
● Others: 0.3%



AZERBAIJAN

AREA	POPULATION
86.600km ²	9.800.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Although the constitution of Azerbaijan recognises the right to free religious expression,¹ in fact this right is limited by other laws.

The law on religion of 2009 requires religious organisations to register and prescribes a strict system of censorship on all religious literature imported, sold and distributed in the country.²

On 15th May 2017 Azerbaijan's parliament approved amendments to allow Azerbaijani citizens and foreign nationals who have received religious instruction abroad to lead Islamic ceremonies in the country (something which Parliament had banned in October 2016), provided they are authorised by the Caucasus Muslims Office (CMO). At the request of this religious body, Azerbaijanis can now be sent to foreign religious educational establishments and the exchange of students and teachers between such institutions is now allowed. Religious propaganda by foreigners is prohibited unless they have been invited by a religious institution.³

Under other amendments approved in October 2016, any religious organisation found guilty of extremism can be dissolved immediately.⁴ Changes to the citizenship law introduced in December 2016 provide that engaging in extremist religious actions or religiously motivated military training abroad is grounds for losing Azerbaijani citizenship.⁵

In March 2017 Azerbaijani legislators also took action to regulate the use of the internet, banning the publication of material that promotes violence, religious extremism, or terrorism as well as ethnic, racial or religious hatred.⁶

In a referendum held in September 2016, major constitutional changes were approved which shifted the balance of power in favour of the presidency, in particular by extending the presidential term from five years to seven years and by giving the president the right to dissolve Parliament and calling elections early.⁷ Some changes introduced by the referendum – such as restricting the right to freedom of assembly for reasons of “public order and morality” and the right to property for reasons of “social justice” – have raised fears that they could be used against religious minorities.

Incidents

Azerbaijan has worked hard to build an image of itself as a multi-cultural country in which members of various ethnic and religious groups live in peace and harmony.⁸ If this is true for the religious groups perceived as traditional, and for Islamic groups associated with the CMO – Pope Francis also praised good institutional and interfaith relations during his visit in October 2016 – the situation is different for non-traditional groups. This applies especially to some Protestant confessions, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Muslims operating outside the CMO. According to the 2017 *Report on Religious Freedom* by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, the state of religious freedom in Azerbaijan deteriorated in 2016, and there was greater repression of independent religious activities.⁹ For non-traditional groups, registration under the law is difficult.

There are positive aspects worth noting, such as the registration of the Bible Society in October 2016 after a 20-year waiting period. However, it is still unclear what type of books the Bible Society will be allowed to publish.¹⁰ In fact, a very restrictive system of censorship is in place in the country.

All religious literature, whether published in Azerbaijan or imported, must be authorised by the State Committee for Works with Religious Organisations, which also specifies a maximum number of copies. The Old Testament, writings by Turkish theologian Said Nursi, and several publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses are still among the banned books.¹¹

Checks are frequent and meticulous. Between late October and early November 2016, 26 bookshops and six homes were inspected and unauthorised religious literature was seized.¹² In the city of Baku, raids against bookstores continued into December, including a Christian bookstore from which 396 books were seized (all of which had a distribution permit or were awaiting approval). Eventually, the administrative proceedings against the bookstore were dismissed and the seized material was returned. In April 2017, the shop in question finally got a licence to sell books and other religious articles, eight years after it had first applied.¹³

In 2017, several booksellers were fined 2,000 manats (€1,100, US\$1,200), the equivalent of about four months’ average wages, for selling religious texts without prior state authorisation.¹⁴

Many believers have also been fined for holding religious meetings, in most cases in the amount of 1,500 manats (€825).¹⁵

Rev Hamid Shabanov and his collaborator Mehman Agamemedov of the Baptist Church of Aliabad – which has been trying to obtain state registration since the mid-1990s – were fined the same amount in December 2016 for holding a religious meeting in a private home.¹⁶

21 Muslims from Quba were also fined 1,500 Manats, each for taking part in an unauthorised meeting in March 2017.¹⁷ Shahin Ahmadov, another Muslim, was fined for the

same amount after he was caught, in April 2017, reading the works of theologian Said Nursi during a picnic with three friends in the mountains.¹⁸

Law enforcement agencies have also gone after Jehovah's Witnesses.¹⁹

Positive developments include the Supreme Court's acquittal on 8th February 2017 of Irina Zakharchenko and Valida Jabrayilova, two Jehovah's Witnesses who were arrested in February 2015 and held in prison for 11 months on charges of distributing religious literature without state permission. The court awarded them damages for unlawful detention.²⁰

State authorities have subjected Muslim communities to further restrictions. The only ones which legally are entitled to exist belong to the CMO, which oversees their activities, including the training and appointment of imams, regular monitoring of sermons and the organisation of pilgrimages to Makkah.²¹

Many mosques have been closed in recent years, both because they had not registered and for other reasons (such as breach of safety regulations). In July 2016, the authorities finally shut down the Lezgin Mosque in the old city of Baku,²² and the Omar bin Khattab Sunni mosque in Qobustan, which had been active for over 25 years. The owner of the land on which the Omar bin Khattab mosque stood, Ahmad Simirov, who was also its imam, was fined 1,500 manats (€825) for leading an unregistered religious organisation.²³ The historic Haji Javad Shia mosque in Baku was demolished at night on 1st July 2017 after countless attempts by the faithful to save it.²⁴

Azerbaijan followed Turkey in launching a criminal investigation against supporters of Islamic mystic Fethullah Gulen in connection with a coup in Turkey.²⁵ The investigation ended with the arrest of various people believed to be linked to the movement including Faiq Amirli, a prominent leader of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan, an opposition party, and editor-in-chief of *Azadlig* newspaper, who was taken into custody in July 2017. He was given three years and three months in prison but his sentence was eventually suspended.²⁶ At Qafqaz University, considered one of the best institutions of higher education in the country, the pro-rector and 50 faculty members were dismissed for alleged ties with the Turkish cleric.²⁷

In January 2017, 17 people linked to the Islamic Unity Movement, including leader Taleh Bagirov, were given lengthy prison sentences. They were all arrested following a police raid in Nardaran, in November 2015.²⁸ 14 of those convicted were eventually released in September 2017.²⁹

In July 2017, Shia Imam Sardar Babayev of Masalli was the first Muslim to be convicted of leading Friday prayers despite receiving a theological education outside Azerbaijan. He will have to serve a three-year prison sentence.³⁰

Although President Alyiev stated that there is no radicalism or religious fundamentalism³¹ in the country, a great degree of concern about possible extremist trends persists. There were numerous arrests and convictions for suspected terrorism. For example, a court in Baku convicted seven Azerbaijani citizens who had been accused of fighting for Daesh (ISIS) and sentenced them to prison terms ranging from two to 14 years.³² In 2016, 58

people were stripped of their citizenship for alleged involvement in religious extremism and terrorist activities abroad.³³

Prospects for freedom of religion

With an economy in crisis, Azerbaijani President Aliyev has done his utmost to boost his and his family's hold on power. Together with a major crackdown on dissenting voices, this has alarmed many international observers.³⁴ Regarding religious freedom, the main concern lies with hardening government policy towards non-traditional groups and towards those operating outside direct state control, who are more vulnerable to repressive actions by police forces and judicial authorities.

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THE BAHAMAS

RELIGION



- Christians: 93,1%
- Agnostics: 4,2%
- Spiritists: 1.9%
- Others: 0,8%



AREA

13.940km²

POPULATION

393.658

Legal framework on religious freedom and actual implementation

In its preamble, the constitution¹ stresses respect for Christian values and the rule of law. The constitution also references the supremacy of God and enshrines the rights and fundamental freedoms of the individual. Article 15 of the constitution states every individual has the right to the protection of his or her fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association, always subject to the respect of the rights and freedoms of others and of the public interest, without distinction of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex.

Article 18 respects the right of conscientious objection to military service.

Article 22, s 1 of the constitution states that no one shall be hindered in the enjoyment of their freedom of conscience, including the freedom of thought and religion, the freedom to change one's religion or beliefs, to manifest and propagate them through worship, teaching, practice and observance, either individually or collectively, in public or in private.

Article 22, s 2 states that no one attending a place of education can be forced to receive religious instruction or take part in religious ceremony or observance that is not in the religion they profess without their consent (or that of their guardian in case of minors under the age of 18) no one will be obliged to receive religious instruction, take part or attend any religious ceremony that is not of the religion they profess.

Article 22, s 3 states that no religious body or denomination will be prevented or hindered from providing religious education to its members, whether they receive government subsidies or not.

Article 22, s 4 states that no one can be forced to take an oath against their beliefs or in a manner that contravenes their religion or beliefs.

Incidents

In the period under review, no violations of religious freedom were reported. Instead, a certain rapprochement between various religious groups was observed. For example, in

January 2018 the country's authorities held an ecumenical religious ceremony to mark the anniversary of Majority Rule,² which commemorates the first time the majority of members of the country's House of Assembly were of black African descent.

Prospects for freedom of religion

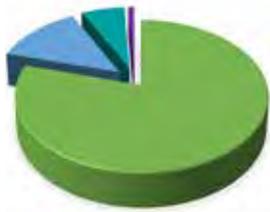
The situation remains unchanged.

Endnotes

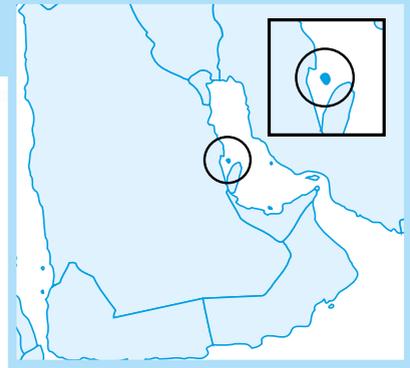
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BAHRAIN

RELIGION



- Muslims: 79,4%
- Christians: 13,2%
- Hindus: 6,5%
- Others: 0,9%



AREA
717km²

POPULATION
1.397.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 2 of the 2002 constitution states: "The religion of the State is Islam. The Islamic Shari'a is a principal source for legislation."¹ Article 6 states: "The state safeguards the Arab and Islamic heritage." However, article 18 states: "There shall be no discrimination among [citizens] on the basis of sex, origin, language, religion or creed."² Article 22 guarantees that "freedom of conscience is absolute. The state guarantees the inviolability of worship, and the freedom to perform religious rites and hold religious parades and meetings in accordance with the customs observed in the country."³

Conversion from Islam to another religion is not explicitly forbidden by law. However, social and also legal consequences of doing so would be massive, according to Church representatives who gave interviews on condition they were not to be named. A convert from Islam would lose any rights of inheritance and would be cast out of the family. Non-Muslim missionary activities amongst Muslims are not allowed, and personal consequences for the missionary would be severe.

The Bahraini Penal Code states: "A punishment of imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or a fine not exceeding BD 100 (about US\$265) shall be inflicted upon any person who deliberately causes disturbance to the holding of religious rituals by a recognised sect or to a religious ceremony or meeting or obstructing such events or preventing the holding thereof with the use of force or threat; any person who destroys, damages or desecrates a place of worship of a recognised sect or a symbol or other things having a religious inviolability."⁴

In 2015 there were discussions about a draft law which would criminalise contempt of religion, such as insulting God, defaming religious books or prophets, hate speech and discrimination on grounds of creed or sect.⁵

In order to operate in the country, non-Muslim religious groups are required to register with the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD). Altogether, 19 non-Muslim religious groups are registered with the MOSD, including Christian churches and a Hindu temple.⁶

Bahrain is a kingdom located in the Persian Gulf and ruled by the Sunni Al Khalifa dynasty. According to estimates, up to two-thirds of the citizens are Shi'a. The remainder – between 30 and 35 percent – are Sunni. There are a small number of Christian, Jewish, Baha'i and Hindu nationals. Bahrain is thus one of the few Gulf countries to allow non-Muslim citizens. Christians with Bahraini citizenship number around 1,000.⁷ The majority of these Christians were immigrants to Bahrain between 1930 and 1960.⁸ They were eventually granted Bahraini citizenship. Most of them were originally Arab Christians from the Middle East, although there are smaller numbers from India.⁹

About 50 percent of Bahrain's population consist of foreign workers. The majority comes primarily from south Asian countries. Almost half of the expatriate workers are non-Muslim (about 250,000-300,000). Christians, including foreigners, comprise perhaps 10 percent of the population, out of which around 80,000 Catholics live in Bahrain.¹⁰ In 2014, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa granted the Catholic Church permission to build its first cathedral, although construction was delayed.

There are 19 registered churches.¹¹ The first Christian church was built in 1905 by American missionaries soon after their arrival. A year later, the National Evangelical Church became the first church to offer services in Bahrain. There are currently two Roman Catholic churches: the Sacred Heart Church in Manama, and the Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Visitation in Awali.¹²

There is a small Jewish community with fewer than 50 members,¹³ mostly descendants of families who came from Iraq, Iran and India and who settled in the island kingdom in the early 1900s. They have their own synagogue – Bahrain is the only Arab Persian Gulf state with an active synagogue¹⁴ – a cemetery and they do enjoy a certain social, political and financial status. The Jewish community has been represented in the upper chamber of the bicameral parliament by Ebrahim Daoud Nonoo. He was subsequently replaced by his niece, Houda Ezra Nonoo. This businesswoman, who was the first non-Muslim woman to head a human rights society and the first Jewish woman Member of Parliament in Bahrain, also became in 2008 the first Jewish Ambassador from an Arab and predominantly Muslim country appointed to the United States of America.¹⁵ Nancy Khadhori currently represents the Jewish community in Bahrain at the 40-seat Shura Council (upper chamber).

Incidents

In April 2018, the King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Co-existence inaugurated the "Kingdom of Bahrain Declaration"¹⁶ platform.¹⁷ This declaration, as opposed to the Marrakesh Declaration and the Jakarta Declaration (both signed in 2016), is unique in that it is signed by a head of state, and not by a group of scholars.¹⁸

Johnnie Moore¹⁹ has told Christianity Today that the declaration goes farther than any similar document that he is aware of.²⁰ Although it goes beyond previous statements regarding individual aspects of religious tolerance, the right of conversion is not mentioned in the document: "Compelled religion cannot bring a person into a meaningful relationship

with God. [...] People of all faiths should be accorded the right to congregate to worship, educate, celebrate, and practice the requirements of their respective faiths.”²¹ Individual religious freedom is just one of the five points raised in the declaration.

In October 2017, King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa published an op-ed opinion piece in the *Washington Post*²² in which he called for religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Despite these efforts to promote religious freedom, inter-faith understanding, and peaceful coexistence, religious freedom conditions did not improve for the Shi’a Muslim community. Although no Shi’a religious leaders were targeted in 2017,²³ in May of the same year, authorities undertook a security operation in the predominantly Shi’a Muslim village of Diraz, causing many casualties: five Shi’a demonstrators died, dozens were injured and nearly 300 were arrested, among them civilians and religious leaders.²⁴

The independent news site *Al Wasat* was suspended by Bahraini authorities in June 2017. It was accused of publishing a column which abused a fellow Arab country and which intended to “stir up the community and affect the relations of the Kingdom of Bahrain with other countries.”²⁵ *Al Wasat* commonly reported on issues affecting the majority Shi’a community.

Prospects for religious freedom

Recently, a Holy See diplomat stated: “The Kingdom of Bahrain, with its constitutional protections for freedom of conscience, the inviolability of places of worship, and the freedom to celebrate religious rites, [is] a beacon for religious pluralism and tolerance in a region where such openness is not ubiquitous.”²⁶

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has concluded that the Bahraini government has made demonstrable progress in rebuilding demolished Shi’a mosques and religious structures destroyed during the spring of 2011 unrest, as well as in implementing tolerance in school curricula.²⁷

Nevertheless, more needs to be done to implement recommendations from the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) to redress past abuses against Shi’a Muslims and improve further religious freedom conditions.²⁸ There still remain major grievances for the country’s Shi’a community. Because religion and political affiliation are often closely linked, it is difficult to categorise many incidents as being solely based on religious identity. Given the geopolitical tensions in the region between Sunni and Shi’a powers led by Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the recent Qatari crisis, it will not be easy to address them.

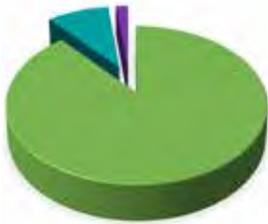
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BANGLADESH

RELIGION



- Muslims: 88,9%
- Hindus: 9,3%
- Others: 1,8%



AREA	POPULATION
147.570 km ²	162.911.000

Legal framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

The political institutions of Bangladesh have the distinction of being under a paradoxical constitution that recognises both secularism as an underlying political principle and Islam as the religion of the state. Article 12 of the constitution (on “Secularism and freedom of religion”) was suspended in the past, but was restored in June 2011 under the 15th amendment. It stipulates: “The principle of secularism shall be realised by the elimination of: (a) communalism in all its forms; (b) the granting by the state of political status in favour of any religion; (c) the abuse of religion for political purposes; (d) any discrimination against, or persecution of, persons practicing a particular religion.”¹ At the same time, article 2A states that “The state religion of the Republic is Islam” while there is also “equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions.”

This paradox has persisted for some years. On 28th March 2016, the High Court of Justice of Bangladesh upheld the status of Islam as the state religion.² In the background to this decision was an application made in 1988 to the same court. At that time, about 15 eminent individuals had questioned the legitimacy of the 1988 constitutional amendment that made Islam the state religion; their argument had been that the recognition of Islam as a state religion is in contradiction with the principle of the secularism of the state. These eminent personalities finally abandoned their application, believing that the judges would be unfavourable to them. However, the argument was revived in August 2015, by a lawyer called Samendra Nath Goswami, who filed another petition to challenge the legality of the amendment that made Islam the state religion. In 2016, the judges were therefore faced with a major issue, namely the status of Islam within Bangladeshi society. At the time, with the country torn by religious tensions and the rise of an Islamist movement, the judges ruled in favour of the prominent place of Islam in the constitutional charter.

Bangladesh proclaimed its independence in 1971 and throughout its history it has been confronted with the question of how to define its identity. Is Bangladesh a secular country or an Islamic nation? Sunni Islam unquestionably occupies a major place in a country that is proud of its tolerant and moderate traditions. In 1972, Bangladesh adopted a constitution based on a linguistic and secular identity, and in 1988 it was a military regime, led by Dictator Hussein Muhammad Ershad, that decided to modify the constitution to make

Islam the religion of the state. Since then, a powerful political and intellectual movement has sought to restore the historical principle of national secularism. So far, these efforts have been in vain.

The conflict over the country's identity has given birth to two opposing ideological factions: "secularists" and "Islamists". "Relations between religion and state are pivotal in the history of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, but also in the history of the project of the Bangladeshi nation since its creation in 1971," says Samuel Berthet, historian and lecturer at the University of Shiv Nadar in India.³ In fact, Bangladesh was originally East Pakistan, before it broke away from the western part in 1971 during an extremely violent liberation war. Estimates of the loss of life caused by the war for independence range from 300,000 to 3 million people.⁴ Pro-Pakistan militia, defending an Islamic conception of the nation, tried to crush the secessionists.

"At the time of Bangladesh's creation, the reference to religion was thus associated with Pakistani trusteeship, while secularism was associated with the project of the Bangladeshi nation," the historian goes on to say in his analysis.⁵ Furthermore, "under the growing influence and exchanges with the Middle East, conditions and perceptions have evolved. After being inscribed in 1988 in the constitution by an authoritarian regime, the concept of religious majority was used as a justification for the idea of a state religion. Such influence, which touches a large part of the population, weighs heavily on a majoritarian democracy. Nonetheless, the principle of state religion has also had an impact on the situation of minorities. For the supporters of Bangladesh in its original version, abandoning the reference to a state religion remains paramount. Their claim has become synonymous with guaranteeing freedom of expression, but also with the freedom to practise one's religion, whatever it may be."⁶ In light of the recent evolution of Bangladeshi politics and society, it is, however, clear that secularists are losing ground in the long-running constitutional debate.

Incidents

Unlike Pakistan, Bangladesh does not have an anti-blasphemy law. Local law derives from the Penal Code drafted by the British colonisers in 1860 and in articles 295A and 298, recognises only the offence of wounding or outraging the "religious feelings"⁷ of others. In addition, there is an information technology law that was passed in 2013, under which it is illegal to publish something on the Internet that could "harm public order and the law" or be construed as defamation against religions.⁸

In 2013, Hefazat-e-Islam (Protectors of Islam), an Islamist organisation founded in 2010 as a pressure group, released a 13-point list addressed to the government demanding that legislation and public policies be made more compliant with Islam. Some of the demands have been followed up. Consequently, in January 2017, new textbooks were distributed by the Ministry of National Education to the country's 20,000 schools and madrasas. Soon teachers realised that Bengali textbooks had been purged of certain secular features, in favour of an Islamic reference system. In April 2016, Hefazat-e-Islam

had explicitly asked the authorities that textbooks should have a stronger Islamic character and that 17 poems and epic stories, written by non-Muslim authors and deemed “atheist”, be removed.⁹ Intellectuals protested against what they perceived as “a form of poisoning”, to quote Rasheda K. Choudhury. “I will not use the term 'Islamisation' but it is undeniably a measure against secularism,” said the human rights advocate who is also an expert on educational issues.¹⁰

Everybody remembers the wave of targeted attacks in recent years in Bangladesh. In addition to the attack by an Islamist commando against a coffee shop in Dhaka that killed 22 people, including 18 foreigners, on 1st July 2016, some 40 prominent figures have been murdered by Islamists in the capital and elsewhere in the country (usually they have been stabbed). Each time, the targets have been intellectuals, academics and publishers deemed “atheists”, and members of religious minorities. On 3rd March 2018, an attack targeted an academic and renowned physicist, also known as a writer of children's books and one of the pioneers of Bangladeshi science fiction. Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, 64, was stabbed in the head and the hands by a 25-year-old man who, after being arrested by police, said he had acted like this to “silence an enemy of Islam”.¹¹ The Prime Minister said that the government would take action to ensure that the perpetrator was tried, and that intellectuals like Dr Iqbal would have greater security. However, according to Monsignor Bejoy Nicephorus D’Cruze, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Sylhet (in the north-east of the country), such an attack shows that Islamism is very much alive in Bangladesh. “Legislators claim to have solved the problem. The police are active when an attack happens but then become inactive until the next attack. The police must admit its failure in this case. The police failed to protect Dr Iqbal and must take concrete steps for this not to happen again,” said the Bishop.¹²

According to organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, the International Crimes Tribunal – set up by Sheikh Hasina in 2010 to “provide justice for the victims of the atrocities of the 1971 War of Independence” – will not address the problem of violence in Bangladesh. This special court has sentenced dozens of people to death or life imprisonment, including (in May 2017) Delwar Hossain Sayedee, a major leader of Jamaat-e-Islami.¹³ Islamist parties are accused of supporting the Pakistani army and committing war crimes. However, although these trials make it possible to remove from the political scene some Islamist leaders allied to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), they have no power to curtail the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh. According to the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, the year 2016 saw 1,471 violent incidents against ethnic and religious minorities, compared to the 262 incidents recorded in 2015.¹⁴

It is in this context that Pope Francis made a visit to Dhaka from 30th November to 2nd December 2017. Coming from Myanmar where he had spent six days, the Pope came to comfort the country's small Christian minority. In particular, he asked that Catholics be able to maintain their “freedom” in a country with a rich tradition of inter-religious “harmony”. At the same time, he did not attempt to conceal the problem that country has with terrorism.

The Pope also called for urgent aid for the Rohingyas, stressing “the seriousness of the situation” and requesting “immediate material assistance”.¹⁵ The fate of this overwhelmingly Muslim group – who have fled in their hundreds of thousands from western Myanmar (Burma) because of what the United Nations and humanitarian agencies have identified as “ethnic cleansing” – is a significant issue in Bangladesh. In anticipation of the upcoming monsoon season, which usually peaks in July-August, Bangladeshi authorities have begun moving tens of thousands of Rohingyas to slightly higher ground. However, humanitarian organisations report that the authorities also plan to accommodate a large number of these refugees on the island of Thengar Char (also called Char Piya), off Chittagong; there are concerns that the island is exposed to the monsoon and so is unsuited for such a large number of people.¹⁶

Prospects for freedom of religion

General elections must be held before the end of 2018 and, in this context, the country’s tense political situation is not likely to become calmer soon. In mid-February 2018, the current Prime Minister’s long-time rival was arrested after being accused of corruption. Khaleda Zia, leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, is now serving a five-year prison sentence and it is unclear whether she will be released on bail before the general elections. As he seeks re-election, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League will need to take account of the growing role of Islamist groups in the country’s politics. It is therefore unlikely that the constitutional status of Islam will be challenged. Faced with the BNP, whose ally is the powerful Jamaat-e-Islami (an Islamist party), the Awami League is trying to win over Muslim voters. Thus, we should not expect any decline in tensions in Bangladeshi society, of which religious minorities and ethnic groups are the first victims.

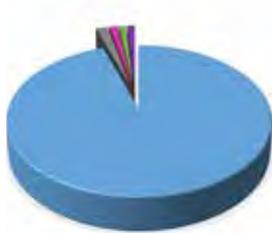
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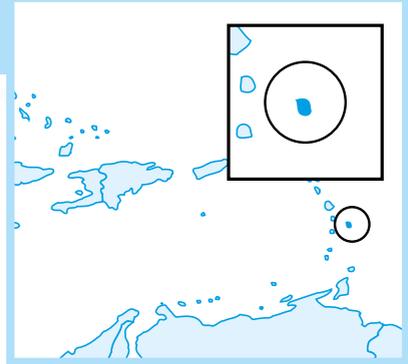
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BARBADOS

RELIGION



- Christians: 95%
- Agnostics: 1,7%
- Baha'is: 1,2%
- Muslims: 1%
- Others: 4,78%



AREA
431km²

POPULATION
285.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In its preamble, the constitution¹ proclaims that Barbados is a sovereign nation that recognises the supremacy of God, the dignity of the human person and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The constitution guarantees the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of every person, subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the public interest. This includes, inter alia, freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association, without distinction of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex (Article 11).

Conscientious objection to military service is recognised (Article 14, s 3, cl c).

No person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of their freedom of conscience, which includes freedom of thought and religion, freedom to change one's religion or belief, manifest it and propagate it through worship, teaching, practice and observance, either alone or with others, in public or in private (Article 19, s 1).

Every religious community has the right to establish and maintain, at their own expense, their own places of education (Article 19, s 2).

No community or religious denomination shall be prevented or hindered from providing education and religious instruction to its members, irrespective of whether it receives government subsidies or not (Article 19, s 3).

No person shall be required to take an oath against their beliefs or in a manner that contravenes their religion or belief (Article 19, s 5).

Except with their own consent (or that of their guardian in case of children under 21 years of age), no person attending a place of education will be required to receive religious instruction or take part or attend a religious ceremony that is not the religion they profess (Article 19, s 4).

The Education Act Chapter 41² regulates the Barbadian educational system. The law states that a child of compulsory school age can be exempted from compulsory attendance on several grounds, including religious observance (Article 42, s 1, cl d). Parents who want

their child exempted from compulsory attendance must apply for a certificate of exemption (Article 42, s 2) to different authorities depending on the reason for the exemption (Article 42, s 3, cl b).

Admission or attendance in a public educational institution is conditional on a pupil, (a) attending or abstaining from attending a place of religious instruction or worship, (b) attending, if a parent objects, a religious observances or instruction in religious subjects at an institution or elsewhere, or (c) attending an institution on any day specially set apart for religious worship by the religious group to which he or she belongs. If parents of a pupil want him or her to be excused from attending any religious observance, they will be excused until such a request is withdrawn (Article 54).

Incidents

In October 2016, former MP Hamilton Lashley said: “For years in Barbados, Rastas have been profiled as criminals, gangsters, basically everything evil under the sun. Rasta’s rights in this country have been violated in the early days.”³ The issue is part of a discussion about the rights of a Rastafarian couple to educate their children at home. The parents claimed they had been discriminated against.

At the end of 2016, during a session of the Barbados Senior Parliament, political scientist Dr Tennyson Joseph said that religious teaching in the country’s schools should end and be replaced by a secular curriculum. He also defended the right of parents to educate their children in freedom.⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

In relation to the period analysed the right of a Rastafarian couple to educate their children at home became a high profile topic of public debate. The law allows home schooling on religious grounds.

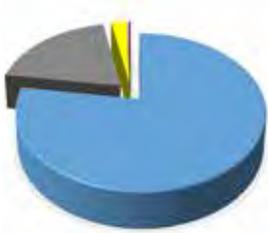
A certain degree of discrimination was observed during 2016-18, suggesting that religious freedom was worse than in the previous period under review.

Endnotes

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BELARUS

RELIGION



- Christians: 77,5%
- Agnostics: 19,6%
- Atheists: 2,5%
- Others: 0,4%



BELARUS

AREA	POPULATION
207.595km ²	9.482.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by article 31 of the constitution¹, which allows individuals to manifest their religious views and gather for corporate worship so long as they do not do anything prohibited by law. Article 16 of the constitution declares the legal equality of all religions and faiths. It also prohibits religious activities which threaten morals or are directed against the state, its political system or the civil liberties of its citizens. The same article also states that the relationship between the state and particular religious organisations “shall be regulated by the law with regard to their influence on the formation of the spiritual, cultural and state traditions of the Belarusian people”.

The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations of 1992² more specifically defines the legal framework for religions in Belarus. Article six establishes the equality of all religions before the law. As long as a religious organisation does not participate in the activities of “political parties and other public associations pursuing political aims” it is allowed to participate in public life and to use state media. Articles 14 and 15 differentiate between religious communities, which are organisations with at least 20 adult members living in one or more settlements in close proximity, and religious associations, consisting of at least 10 religious communities, of which at least one has been active in Belarus for more than 20 years. The latter have the right to establish monasteries, male and female religious orders, religious missions and educational facilities. The religious activities of both communities and associations are limited to the territory in which the given group operates. Article 25 additionally limits those activities to properties that belong to these organisations or its members. In the case of private homes, there are a number of safety regulations a religious organisation has to follow. Large-scale religious events may be held in public if they receive approval from local authorities.

Articles 16 through to 19 regulate the registration process for religious organisations. Registration is necessary for a religious organisation to be recognised as a legal entity. To register, it needs to provide various information including details about its beliefs and its founders, among other requisites. As specified in article 21, an application for registration can be denied if the authorities deem the information unsatisfactory or the doctrines professed to be non-compliant with the law.³

According to article 13, only Belarusian citizens can lead religious organisations.⁴

Article 29 limits the period that a foreign missionary without Belarusian citizenship can be engaged in religious missionary activities to one year, but this can be extended or reduced by the authorities. In April 2017, the authorities refused to extend the residency visa of Father Robert Maciejewski, a Catholic priest, who had served in the country for more than 10 years. The Polish national was required to leave Belarus. He had been the parish priest in Mstislav in the Mogilev (Mahilyow) region. This occurred just two weeks after the head of the diocese, Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, criticised government regulations.⁵ Archbishop Kondrusiewicz identified this as one of several areas of tension between the Church and the state during a speech at the Academy of Public Administration on 2nd May 2017. He also mentioned attempts to control Sunday schools and an unequal conscription policy which unduly affected students in Catholic schools.⁶

The Republic of Belarus and the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC) signed an agreement that establishes a special relationship between the two. While it is not explicitly directed against other religions, article 2 of the concordat speaks about cooperation “against pseudo-religious structures presenting a danger to personality and society”.⁷

In July 2016 the Law of the Republic of Belarus on Alternative Service came into force. This allows those who object to participating in military activities for religious reasons to take part in humanitarian activities instead. This development was welcomed by the Jehovah’s Witnesses among others.⁸

However there seems to be increased hostility towards Jehovah’s Witnesses in Belarus. In March 2018, a petition on the change.org website called on the Commissioner for Religious and Ethnic Affairs, Leonid Gulyako, to suspend all Jehovah Witness activities pending a study by religious experts. The petition cited the recent Russian clamp-down on the group.⁹ Gulyako has in the past made negative comments about Catholics and Jehovah’s Witnesses and previously threatened to rescind the latter’s registration.¹⁰

In October 2017 two members of a Baptist group were detained and fined for religious activities and publicly distributing literature in the city of Vebel. One of them received an injury to his face during the arrest, while the other lost all feeling in his hands due to the handcuffs restricting his circulation. Although Baptists in Belarus refuse state registration on principle, they had not been harassed by the police in over 10 years.¹¹

Vadzim Smok, the coordinator of the Ostrogorski Centre in Belarus, noted that, while the Belarusian state has still not fully condemned Communist atrocities, there have been some positive changes; for example, the acknowledgement and memorialisation of the Kurapaty executions during Stalin’s Great Terror – during which a number of Catholics were killed. Smok’s assessment of recent developments between the Roman Catholic Church and the government is that not only have bilateral meetings intensified, as the state increasingly realises the importance of the Church for its own political goals, but that there are now also more open discussions on difficult issues.

In May 2016 President Lukashenko met with Pope Francis in the Vatican to discuss bilateral relations. According to a statement by the Holy See Press Office, the meeting was cordial and underlined the good level of cooperation between Belarus and the Holy See.¹²

Incidents

In November 2016 three neo-Nazis vandalised a Holocaust memorial in Mogilev by smearing black paint on it. The police investigated the case and the culprits were later convicted for hooliganism. Alexei Kaplan, the chairman of the Directorate of the Jewish Community in Mogilev, suggested that acceptance of, or indifference to, Nazi graffiti runs deep in the population. The monument was defaced during the night, but, according to him, the incident went unreported for 24 hours. Police only investigated the case after activists and reporters publicised it. According to Kaplan, unlike in Soviet times, Jews do not generally feel threatened in Belarus today, but they tend to keep a low profile, for example they would not put up signs that would identify Jewish institutions.¹³

An article from the Times of Israel described how the Jewish community generally feels secure as, unlike in neighbouring Russia or Ukraine, no violent anti-Semitic incidents have occurred in Belarus. The article stated that, while the Jewish community in Belarus profits from the stability of the regime, it also lacks legal protection for its sites and the freedom to speak out against abuses. In 2017, the authorities in the city of Gomel approved the construction of an apartment building on the site of a former Jewish cemetery, where bodies were still interred. In so doing, they drew much criticism from local and international Jewish groups. Yakov Goodman, a Jewish-American activist of Belarusian origin, accused the government of “state anti-Semitism”, claiming that there is disregard for the heritage sites of other religious groups. Other activists have spoken of “an information war” being waged by state-controlled media against Jewish groups opposed to the construction of apartments on the cemetery site in Gomel. A spokesman for the Belarusian Embassy in Israel rejected any notions of state anti-Semitism and stated that Goodman was “a prominent fake newsmaker”.¹⁴

On 29th January 2018, Pavel (Ponomaryov), Metropolitan of Minsk and Zaslauje and Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus, gave a very hostile interview on the subject of the Belarusian Greek Catholic Church. Known for his harsh rhetoric against the West, he stated that “Uniates” believe in a “different God” to the Orthodox, and implied that they are a sectarian organisation prone to pagan idolatry.¹⁵ An article by Dzmitry Mitskevich, an analyst at Belarus Security Blog and editor-in-chief of Varta magazine, explained how Metropolitan Pavel strongly opposes ecumenism and how he has attempted to strengthen ties between Belarus and Russia. In November 2017 he likened the idea of creating an autocephalous Belarusian Orthodox Church, which would be separate from the Moscow Patriarchate, to the temptations of the devil. In a move seen by some commentators as an attempt to counterbalance the scheduled Papal visit to Vilnius in September 2018, he invited Patriarch Kirill of Moscow to come to Minsk in October 2018 to hold a meeting of the Russian Holy Synod in Belarus.¹⁶

In May 2018 seminarians and young priests in Belarus, both Catholic and Orthodox, began receiving call-up papers for military duty.¹⁷ The Military Service Law provides deferral only for men under 27 years of age – on health or family grounds.¹⁸ Nonetheless, clergymen and seminarians have usually benefitted from a postponement of military service following a government decree of 13th April 2006. Deferral is usually granted when dioceses forward a request with the list of names to the Commission of Religious and Ethnic Affairs, which sends them to the Ministry of Defence.¹⁹

Belarus's Catholic bishops appealed to President Alexander Lukashenko to release priests and seminarians from the draft because it would prevent the functioning of seminaries and some parishes.²⁰ Subsequently there were reports that conscripted clerics from both the Orthodox and Catholics would be granted a six-month postponement.²¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

An article in BelarusDigest, drawing on data from the 2017 report on Global Restrictions on Religion by the Pew Research Center²² and the US International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, stated that, at a societal level, hostility towards religious organisations in Belarus is relatively moderate and almost comparable to some of its neighbours, the notable exceptions being Russia and Ukraine. Hence, there are few incidents of social hostility of a religious nature. The actions and legislation of the government, directed against religious organisations, remain the most pressing problem for religious freedom in the country. In the last two years there have been both positive and negative developments. Examples of the first kind are the increasingly good bilateral relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the government, as well as the waiving of visa requirements for short visits by members of the clergy and the Law on Alternative Service. Yet, at the same time, the regime exerts its executive power through a registration policy that is hostile to religious organisations, which leaves the latter in a state of constant legal insecurity.

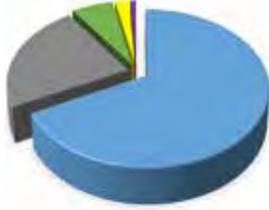
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- 2 Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 2054-XII of December 17, 1992 [Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 137-Z of October 31, 2002; amended as of January 4, 2010] On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations, legislation online, <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/action/popup/id/17908> (accessed 29th April 2018).
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- 4 Ibid.
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BELGIUM

RELIGION



- Christians: 67,4%
- Agnostics: 23%
- Muslims: 6,5%
- Atheists: 2,2%
- Others: 0,9%



AREA	POPULATION
30.528km ²	11.372.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Belgium establishes clear, positive obligations to protect freedom of religion or belief. The most recent version of the constitution, incorporating amendments up until 2014, states¹ in Article 19 “Freedom of worship, its public practice and freedom to demonstrate one’s opinions on all matters are guaranteed, but offences committed when this freedom is used may be punished.” Article 20 states: “No one can be obliged to contribute in any way whatsoever to the acts and ceremonies of a religion or to observe its days of rest.” Article 21 states: “The state does not have the right to intervene either in the appointment or in the installation of ministers of any religion whatsoever or to forbid these ministers from corresponding with their superiors, from publishing the acts of these superiors, but, in this latter case, normal responsibilities as regards the press and publishing apply.” Article 181 states: “The salaries and pensions of ministers of religion are paid for by the state; the amounts required are charged annually to the budget.”

The state finances recognised religious and similar communities. These are: Catholicism, Protestantism, Anglicanism, Judaism, Islam, Orthodoxy and Secular Humanism.² Buddhism is currently in the process of being recognised and applications for Hinduism and the Syriac Orthodox Church are pending.

There are no legal or constitutional criteria for granting state recognition. In 1985, the then Minister of Justice, Jean Gol, said in an answer to a parliamentary question that the following criteria should be taken into consideration: the membership of the religious community, its history, and its contribution to the good of society. However, his understanding of the necessary criteria was never enshrined in law. Whatever their beliefs, taxpayers provide the main financial support for the few state-recognised religions or worldviews.

Groups that are not recognised by the state can acquire the status of non-profit associations. Their members can fully enjoy their rights to religious freedom.³

In public schools, religious or “moral” instruction is provided according to parental preference. The public education system requires neutrality in the presentation of religious views outside of religious education classes. All public schools must provide teachers for each of the state-recognised religious or belief groups. Teachers of religion in public schools are

nominated by their respective faith groups. Faith-based schools follow the same curriculum as public schools and receive government subsidies for operating expenses, such as building maintenance and utilities.⁴ There is an ongoing debate in Wallonia about school curricula, as there is an effort to preserve the teaching of the Catholic faith in faith-based schools.⁵

In February 2016, the Council of State issued a decision allowing teachers of Islam to wear headscarves at school, even for activities other than teaching, although Flemish community schools refused to implement the ruling. Individual public schools continued to have the right to impose a ban on students wearing religious attire, and most public schools maintained policies which restrict the wearing of headscarves.⁶

In May 2017, Wallonia and Flanders voted to ban the ritual slaughter of animals.⁷ The ban is directed against the practice of slaughtering animals without first stunning them. Both Muslim and Jewish ritual slaughter involves cutting the throat of the animals, without other preliminaries. The Jewish community filed an appeal in November 2017 against the decision in Wallonia.⁸

Incidents

In February 2018, in a Haredi Orthodox school in Antwerp, a document instructing teachers not to discuss “sex, reproduction, politics, religion, racism, and personal issues” was apparently circulated by an employee. The school authorities have since distanced themselves from the document, saying that it did not emanate from them. As a result, the Flemish Education Minister, Hilde Crevits, launched an investigation into the Benoth Jerusalem school.⁹

In early 2018, a 24-year old was briefly detained by Belgian police for anti-Semitic hate crimes, including the destruction of at least 20 mezuzahs in Antwerp. In the weeks prior to his detention, the same man was filmed destroying the mezuzahs, and vandalizing the doors of several Jewish institutions, knocking the hat off of an Orthodox Jew on the street while shouting about Palestine, and laying a Quran near a synagogue.¹⁰

In February 2018, a car in central Antwerp swerved at high speed towards a father and son who were dressed in Hasidic garb. The Antwerp police decided that this was not a hate crime. The Belgian League Against Anti-Semitism disagreed with this analysis and initiated a private prosecution against the driver.¹¹

The Belgian Federation of Jewish Organisations filed a motion in the Constitutional Court of Belgium seeking an injunction against the ban of ritual slaughter in the country.¹²

In 1968 Belgium recognised the Islamic and Cultural Centre (ICC) as the representative platform of Muslims and Islam in Belgium. The following year, the Belgian government signed an agreement granting the ICC, then represented by the ambassadors of Saudi Arabia and Morocco, the use for 99 years of a building complex in the Parc du Cinquante-naire in Brussels. The building complex now accommodates the Grand Mosque, a school, and a centre for research and training about Islam and the Arabic language. For years the Grand Mosque of Brussels has been accused of propagating Wahhabism and Salafism in Belgium.¹³

In its fourth intermediary report published on 23rd October 2017, the Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry on Radicalism and Terrorism¹⁴ expressed a number of concerns about the opacity of the management of the Grand Mosque and accused the Grand Mosque of spreading Wahhabism in Belgium. It recommended that Saudi Arabia's control of the Grand Mosque should cease and that the Egyptian Imam of the Grand Mosque, Abdelhadi Sewif, should be deported. On 28th November, a Belgian court did not uphold an order to deport the cleric on account of the insufficient evidence against him.¹⁵

On 17th March 2018, the Federal Government of Belgium terminated the contract between the Belgian State and the ICC. One year's notice was given, after which the Executive of the Muslims of Belgium (EMB) will take over the management of the building complex. The Grand Mosque will then be a place of worship, the seat of the executive of the EMB, and a training institute for Islamic leaders.¹⁶

In 2017, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in the case of *Belcacemi and Oussar v. Belgium* that the Belgian law of 2011 banning the wearing of clothing that partly or totally covers the face in public did not violate any human rights. The court ruled that the Belgian law, "sought to guarantee the conditions of 'living together' and the 'protection of the rights and freedoms of others' and that it was 'necessary in a democratic society'".¹⁷

In November 2016, Theo Francken, Belgium's State Secretary for Migration, decided to expel the imam of Dison/Verviers, a Dutch-Moroccan citizen, for inciting hatred against Christians and for disseminating jihadist propaganda. In 2016, his son, Souhaib Amaouch, a minor born in Belgium, was put in a youth detention center for posting a video in which he called for the murder of Christians.¹⁸

From 2017 to 2018, numerous acts of vandalism targeted cemeteries, Catholic churches and buildings. The Observatoire de la Christianophobie¹⁹ and the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe²⁰ reported the following cases (among many others):

In the first three months of 2018, a Chaldean church was desecrated, vandalised and looted in Antwerp; there was an arsonist attack on a Catholic church in Charleroi; and 28 tombstones were tagged by Satanists in Cheratte Hauteur.

In October 2017, unknown perpetrators broke into the Church of Saint-Remi de Baulers and ransacked the sacristy.²¹

In April 2017, over 50 graves were vandalised, several tombs were destroyed, and crosses on graves were thrown on the ground in the cemetery of Ougrée.²²

In April 2017, two Polish women were on their way to a bus station after attending Mass on Palm Sunday when they were attacked by a man who spoke Arabic and cursed at them in French calling them "dirty Christians" and "whores" ("sales chrétiennes" and "putes"). It is reported that the women were carrying palms from Mass and that these enabled the man to identify them as Christians.²³

In March 2016, a court in Brussels refused to rule that the Church of Scientology was a "criminal enterprise". In his judgement, Judge Yves Regimont said that the defendants had

been targeted because of their religion: “The entire proceedings are declared inadmissible for a serious and irremediable breach of the right to a fair trial”. The judge criticised the investigators involved in the case for being too vague in their case against Scientology and for being prejudiced against it.²⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

Although the system of recognition of religions and worldviews by the state leads to a discriminatory tiered system, the Federal State is becoming increasingly open to recognising more religious communities. However, this process is slow.

The terrorist attacks perpetrated by Belgian Islamists at the airport and in a metro station in Brussels in March 2016 have led to the creation of a Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry on Radicalism and Terrorism. Great caution is taken in its successive reports not to lump together Muslims and Islamists who have sworn allegiance to Daesh (ISIS). The following recommendations have been made: to identify the penetration channels of Islamism in Belgium; to better track potential terrorists; to increase public security; to prevent radicalisation of youth; and also to put in place more inclusive policies for young Muslims who may be vulnerable to the propaganda of Daesh.

It is estimated that 200-300 young Belgian Muslims have taken part in the war in Syria and Iraq. A number of them have died in the fighting. Those who have returned to Belgium are under surveillance.

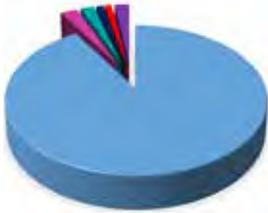
In the last few years, the growth of Islam through increased immigration has aroused various forms of social hostility. Anti-Muslim sentiments remain a danger that needs to be contained and fought against. Although there is a political consensus about the need to avoid the stigmatisation of the Muslim community, the traditional spirit of tolerance and social peace can only be preserved if the media show restraint in their reporting and if schools fulfil their mission of educating in a spirit of mutual respect.

Endnotes

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RELIGION



- Christians: 91,3%
- Baha'is: 2,5%
- Hindus: 2%
- Jews: 1%
- Spiritists: 1%
- Others: 2,2%



AREA	POPULATION
22.966km ²	367.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the constitution¹ recognises the “supremacy of God” and expresses faith in human rights and fundamental freedoms, the dignity of the human person and the equal and inalienable rights given by God to everyone.

The constitution guarantees these fundamental freedoms subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the public interest, which includes, among others, freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association, regardless of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex (Article 3).

Freedom of conscience is protected, including freedom of thought and religion, as well as the freedom to change one’s religion or belief, to manifest and propagate it through worship, teaching, practice and observance, alone or with others, in public or in private (Article 11, section 1).

Except with their own consent (or that of their parents or guardian in the case of minors under 18 years of age), no person attending a place of education or held in prison or serving in the Armed Forces shall be required to receive religious instruction or take part or attend any religious ceremony that is not of their own religion (Article 11, section 2).

All state recognised religious communities have the right to establish and maintain educational establishments at their own expense. Nor will they be impeded from providing education and religious instruction to their members, irrespective of whether the communities in question receive government subsidies (Article 11, section 3).

No one shall be required to take an oath against their beliefs or in a manner that contravenes their religion or belief (Article 11, section 4).

No law may be discriminatory in itself or in its effects, where discrimination means the different treatment of people by reason of their sex, race, place of origin, political opinions, colour or creed (Article 16).

The Governor General appoints one of the twelve members of the Senate in accordance with the recommendation by the Belize Council of Churches and the Evangelical Association of Churches (Article 61, section 4, clause c).

Religious groups must register with the Companies Registry as do businesses. Registration allows religious organisations to operate legally in the country and be recognised by the state. The government may close the facilities of groups that do not register.

Churches and other places of worship are exempt from paying property taxes.²

Religious organisations can operate in partnership with the state to operate or manage schools, hospitals and other charities and receive financial assistance from the government.³

Foreign religious workers require a religious worker's visa to enter the country and proselytise.⁴

The public school curriculum includes non-denominational 'spirituality' classes, including the teaching of morals, values and religions of the world. Parents can decide whether their children will attend these classes or not.⁵

A Christian chaplain is integrated in the country's Armed Forces. Clergy from other religious groups can serve inmates in prison.⁶

Incidents

In September 2017, the Belize Council of Churches issued a statement opposing a decision to hold the Tenth Day parade, a national holiday that commemorates the Battle of Saint George's Caye, on a Sunday, the Lord's Day for Christians. The Churches stated that the timing of the event made it difficult for people to attend Sunday worship and undermined the country's religious tradition and heritage.⁷

In November 2017, the country's Attorney General, Michael Peyrefitte, harshly criticised the role played by the National Evangelical Association in a debate over the decriminalisation of cannabis. He claimed that clergy had no moral authority over those smoking cannabis and said pastors should be in their churches, praying.⁸

In February 2018, the Catholic Church's challenge to the August 2016 legalisation of sex between people of the same gender hit a setback when the Church's lawyer pulled out. It meant the Church had no representation.⁹ After the legislation was passed, the government announced an appeal but one that focused only on the question of "sex" as it appears in the constitution to include "sexual orientation".¹⁰ Such a step gave the Catholic Church the possibility of appealing the legislation in its entirety. However, given its lack of representation, the Church runs the risk of being excluded from the case.¹¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

The incidents that occurred during the period under review are symptomatic of tensions between the Churches and the government. Although there were no recorded incidents of religious intolerance – unlike the previous reporting period – the 2016-18 time frame saw an increasing discord between the Church, with its restatement of traditional beliefs, and the authorities which are promoting more liberal values.

Endnotes

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BENIN

RELIGION



- Christians: 44,7%
- Ethnoreligionists: 28,9%
- Muslims: 26%
- Others: 0,4%



AREA	POPULATION
114.763km	11.372.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and its application

For several years, Benin has been subject to a growing threat from Islamic jihadism.¹ This type of extremism has already triggered a spiral of violence in a number of neighbouring countries. Jihadist Islamism has caused great concern in Benin as well, even though no major attacks have been perpetrated within the country itself. That is why Benin joined the African deployment force of several thousand troops that fought the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram in Nigeria, Benin's neighbour to the east. In all, Benin has sent 793 soldiers, 361 gendarmes and 20 military experts to nine international peace missions worldwide, with a focus on Africa. It also provides support to the UN deployment force stationed in northern Mali, whose mission is also to fight Islamist terrorism.²

There is no tradition of religious fundamentalism in Benin itself, either in terms of legislation or the practice of religion in the population. The country's constitution defines Benin as a secular state that prohibits religious discrimination. Religious freedom is enshrined as a fundamental human right and is considered a core principle of interreligious interactions.³ People who wish to establish a religious community must present their request to the Ministry of the Interior and have their group registered. Registration requires submission of a variety of official documents and payment of the equivalent of around US\$80. If a religious group is not registered but active, the Ministry of the Interior will proceed to close down that group's facilities until proper registration has been completed.

The law prohibits religious instruction in public schools under the country's constitutional principle of separation of state and religion.

Religious diversity in Benin is probably among the broadest in the region. The state respects this pluralism. During the reporting period, government officials attended dedication ceremonies, funerals and other religious events held by a variety of religious groups.⁴

Relations between religious communities are considered peaceful.

Some 17 percent of the population engage in voodoo, a widespread practice in West Africa. Muslims and Catholics are roughly equal in numbers.⁵ A small section of the population belongs to the Celestial Church of Christ, a Christian community with teachings strictly

based on the Bible. It was founded in 1947 in Benin and is now represented in several other West African countries as well.

In practice, there is a great deal of overlap among the different denominations. Some Christians and Muslims also practise voodoo, although not always openly.⁶ Syncretism can be found among all social strata across the whole country, and is generally accepted. It can even be found within the same family – without causing significant tensions or conflicts.

Incidents

There was no change in the tradition of peaceful interreligious relations in Benin during the reporting period, nor any reports of acts of violence. As indicated, in 2015 the country affirmed its commitment to religious tolerance and harmonious coexistence by sending troops into neighbouring Nigeria to join the fight against Boko Haram.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Since a multiparty system was introduced in the early 1990s, Benin has experienced no fewer than four transfers of power through general elections – in 1991, 1996, 2006 and again in 2016, when businessman Patrice Talon, once an ally of former President Thomas Boni Yayi, soundly defeated the latter's prime minister, Lionel Zinsou, in a run-off election on 20th March 2016 with more than 65 percent of the vote.⁷ The elections again confirmed that Benin is one of the more politically stable West African nations.

As far as the Catholic Church in Benin is concerned, external influences are less of a problem than the superficial observance of the faith. Although Catholicism continues to grow, during an *ad limina* visit to Rome by the Benin bishops in April 2015, Pope Francis said that religious practice in the country “is sometimes superficial and lacking in soundness”.⁸ He went on to say that a “profound knowledge of the Christian mystery may not be the exclusive right of the elite”⁹ and must be accessible to all believers. This is all the more important as the bishops in Benin should be “vigilant regarding the numerous ideological and media attacks.”¹⁰ An intact marriage and family life, he pointed out, are essential. Pope Francis continued: “I know that the pastoral care of marriage is still difficult, bearing in mind the actual, social and cultural situation of your people”, but he urged the bishops not to become discouraged. “[T]he family the Catholic Church defends is a reality wanted by God.”¹¹

The Catholic Church in Benin is considered a moral authority, not just on theological questions, but in social and political matters as well. Many people in Benin still vividly recall the visit by Pope Francis' predecessor, Benedict XVI, in 2011. Many non-Catholics had a positive view of the visit and saw it as the beginning of a new religious awareness.

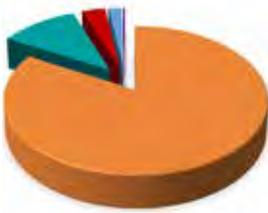
As Benin's clear stance against Islamist violence suggests, the country may increasingly become the target of West African-based jihadist organisations.¹²

Endnotes

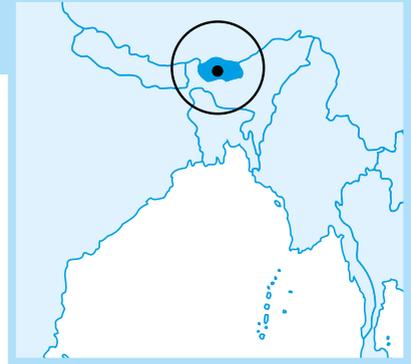
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BHUTAN

RELIGION



- Buddhists: 83,2%
- Hindus: 11,3%
- Ethnoreligionists: 3,3%
- Christians: 1,9%
- Others: 0,3%



AREA	POPULATION
38.364km ²	784.000

Legal framework on religious freedom and actual application

In terms of religious freedom, things have not really changed in the past two years. In this country, where Vajrayāna Buddhism (a variant of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism) is the state religion, one of the main issues is the place of Buddhism and its large clergy (about 3,500 monks out of a population of 784,000). The 2008 constitution illustrates the contradictions between a desire to modernise the country and concerns about foreign influence. Thus, among the many paradoxes of the Bhutanese constitution, the most important one is that, while based on Buddhist culture and religion and declaring itself “bound to defend this heritage”, the constitution also lays down the bases for the separation of religion and state. In so doing, it breaks with centuries of civilian and religious government. During the elections, the Electoral Commission upheld this idea (“religions must be above the political debate” and monks do not have the right to vote), but it is by no means shared by all the Buddhist clergy. Among the latter, many are convinced that the secular foundations of Bhutan’s constitution are in contradiction with the predominant influence they believe Buddhism should exert on the country and the state.¹

In practice, although religious freedom is enshrined in the constitution, any proselytising “by a foreign religion” is forbidden in the country. Non-Buddhist religious personnel are not allowed into the country, and non-Buddhist religions must be practised privately. In the case of Christianity, viewed as “the vanguard of the West”, there is great mistrust. Christians are perceived as a threat to “Bhutanese national identity”, which is seen as one and the same with Buddhism. Although Christians number only a few thousand (including a few hundred Catholics), there is a ban on proselytising, handing out Bibles and building churches, schools or other Christian institutions.

The prohibitions against non-Buddhists are directly linked to a desire to preserve “the nation’s heritage”. For example, local Buddhists consider mountains as sacred land, and the government forbids Christians from burying their dead there. Anyone who flouts this ban risks having their graves desecrated – a situation that has been the cause of frequent strife.

Incidents

The desire to protect the nation's heritage is not only aimed at minority religions. It also appears to be behind a ban in January 2017 against screening a film in the country. The movie in question, "Hema Hema: Sing Me a Song While I Wait", was directed by Dzon-gsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche. A citizen of Bhutan, this Tibetan Buddhist lama was criticised for showing masked characters. According to the Department of Culture of the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, the use of religious masks "is not in keeping with our own tradition and culture".² For some, the ban stems from a desire not to allow the nation's heritage and cultural traditions to be destabilised by excessively rapid cultural and economic development.

At another level, the crisis that began in the 1990s with the mass expulsion of the Lhotshampas, an ethnic group of Nepali origin practising Hinduism and living in the south of the country, has still not yet ended.³ The Lhotshampas – descendants of Nepali Hindus who settled in the kingdom of Bhutan in the early twentieth century – paid a price in the 1990s for the government's policy of "Bhutanisation". More than 100,000 of them became stateless after they were expelled, ending up in refugee camps in Nepal, where they stayed until 2007 when the United Nations began resettling them in third countries. The refusal to consider this community as part of the nation has led some observers to view the democracy established in Bhutan as a "conditional democracy" from which some groups are excluded on the basis of ethnicity or religion.

Prospects for religious freedom

For some time, the United Nations and a number of economists have argued that the Gross National Product (GNP) is not a measure that accurately and fairly reflects the wealth of a nation, especially in terms of social progress. Instead, they stress the need to measure a nation's "global happiness". This notion echoes the widely publicised measure of Gross National Happiness (GNH) adopted by the Bhutanese government. However, in this small landlocked Himalayan country, the GNH does not seem to be fully realised: in 2017, the United Nations "World Happiness Report" ranked Bhutan 97th out of 155 countries evaluated.⁴

The relatively poor result for Bhutan, a country of just under 800,000 inhabitants, on the international scale of "happiness" does not prevent it from becoming familiar with some form of political modernity. The Bhutanese government seems to be driven by a desire to develop the country's economy in order to create jobs for its large youth population (the overall median age is 28), while protecting society from opening up and developing too fast. With respect to religion, this attitude is reflected in a very cautious approach to opening up. With the adoption of a law on religious organisations in 2007, a special agency was set up, the Chhoedey Lhentshog (Commission for Religious Organisations), to deal with faith-based groups. In all, 94 organisations have been officially recognised, but all of them are Buddhist and Hindu. The Hindu minority is represented by the Hindu Dharma Samudaya of Bhutan (the Hindu religious community of Bhutan). In the case of

Christians, even though the country's authorities say they have no objection to them living their faith in Bhutan, they have also made it clear that they do not welcome conversions. Thus, the small local Christian communities have adapted to the circumstances and have refrained from demanding official recognition for their institutions.

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BOLIVIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 92,8%
- Ethnoreligionists: 2,8%
- Baha'is: 2,2%
- Agnostics: 1,9%
- Others: 0,3%



AREA	POPULATION
1.098.581 km ²	10.888.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the constitution of the “Plurinational State of Bolivia” states that the country was re-founded “with the strength of our Pachamama and with gratefulness to God”.¹

Article one of the constitution provides that Bolivia is an “inter-cultural” state based on “cultural pluralism”. According to article four, the state is “independent of religion” and respects and guarantees freedom of religion and spiritual belief. The people of Bolivia have, according to article 21, the right to “freedom of belief, spirituality, religion and cult, expressed individually or collectively, in public and in private, for legal purposes”.

Under article 14(2), the state “prohibits and punishes” all forms of discrimination based on religious belief. According to article 14(3), the free and effective exercise of rights established in “the constitution, the laws and international human rights treaties” is guaranteed without any discrimination.

The right of indigenous nations and peoples to their cultural identity, religious beliefs, spirituality, practices and customs and to their own worldview is expressly protected in article 30. Their sacred places must also be protected, and their traditional knowledge, medicine, rituals and symbols must be respected and promoted.

Freedom in the teaching of religion in educational establishments is also guaranteed. Under article 86, it is not permitted to discriminate in the enrolment of students on the grounds of their religious convictions. The right of religious entities to administer educational establishments is recognised in article 87. Under article 88(2), the right of parents to choose the education of their children is to be respected.

In 1986, an agreement was signed between the Holy See and Bolivia on religious assistance to the Armed Forces and the National Police Forces.²

Incidents

During the period under review, a new penal code was discussed. In light of Constitutional Judgment 206/2014, which established the constitutionality of the criminalisation of

abortion, discussion centred on article 157 of the code that sets out certain exceptions to the ban. Some sectors of society and churches were excluded from the discussion, and this was denounced by the Catholic Bishops' Conference in April 2017. In September 2017, members of the House of Deputies approved an article, which allows more grounds for legal termination of pregnancy than had been provided for in previous legislation. The article recognises the right of medical and health professionals to refuse to participate in abortions for reasons of conscience. In March 2018 the Bishop of Oruro called on policy makers to reject any attempt to legalise abortion.³

Article 88 of the new penal code was also controversial. The article states that a person who, alone or through third parties, captures, transports, transfers, deprives of liberty, hosts or receives people in order to recruit them "to participate in armed struggles or in religious or faith-based organisations..." shall be punishable with imprisonment and fines. In January 2018 the Catholic Church warned that the article risked criminalising missionary activity. Evangelical Churches also expressed their opposition and stated that the provision violates freedom of religion and conscience. The speaker of the Senate noted that the provision only intends to punish illegal activities and is intended to prevent militant extremism in Bolivia.⁴

When four people, robbed, abducted and abused an 81-year-old nun, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bolivia responded in September 2016 by condemning their actions.

In March 2017, at the request of the International Affairs Committee of the Bolivian Senate, religious organisations including St Paul Bolivian Catholic University, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bolivia and the National Association of Evangelicals held a citizens' forum on "Freedom of Expression and Religious Freedom". Its purpose was to consider the law of religious freedom in the light of two conventions that were before Bolivia's Legislative Assembly, namely the Organisation of American States, Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination, and Related Forms of Intolerance and the Inter-American Convention against All Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance.⁵

This is the first time that a citizen's forum has been held assessing the relationship between the law on discrimination and the exercise of religious freedom. At the meeting, concerns were raised about the future ratification of the conventions. It was argued that ambiguities in the definitions of discrimination and intolerance could result in the violation of the rights of religious freedom and freedom of expression.⁶ In December 2016 the Chamber of Deputies passed Bill 381 (of the 2016-2017 legislature) which ratified both conventions. The bill then went before the International Affairs Committee of the Senate, which approved it. However, it failed to be adopted by the whole chamber. As the bill failed to pass before the end of the legislative session, it has to be presented again to become law.

In May 2017 President Evo Morales asked Pope Francis for his intervention in the conflict with Chile over the arrest of nine Bolivian officials at the border. The following December, the President had a private audience with the Pope to address issues related to climate change and Bolivia's maritime demands.⁷

In January 2018, the Catholic Church condemned the police for arresting students holding a protest in a temple in La Paz. The Archbishop of Sucre said sacred places should always be respected as places of asylum.⁸

In February 2018 celebrations were held for Mother Earth according to an Andean ritual in which houses, businesses and crops were blessed. This was a thanksgiving for the harvest. Houses, markets and public roads were decorated.⁹

On 1st March 2018 the Department of Oruro gave public servants a day off to attend a religious service of atonement to the Virgen del Socavón, after an artist depicted her in lingerie. The event was organised by the local diocese, the Department and the Mayor of Oruro and consisted of a procession through the streets of the city.¹⁰

Prospects for freedom of religion

In Bolivia, no major problems have been reported concerning the individual exercise of religious freedom. The government remains actively involved with religious institutions. Civil authorities seem to rely on the authority of Pope Francis in complex situations by requesting his collaboration or mediation, which is exceptional in a functioning political system.

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BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

RELIGION



- Muslims: 48,8%
- Christians: 48%
- Agnostics: 2,7%
- Others: 0,5%



AREA	POPULATION
51.209km ²	3.802.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The 1995 Dayton peace agreement brought the 1992-95 war to an end, establishing the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, occupying the western and central areas, and Republika Srpska, located in the north and the east. Both regions have their own president, government, parliament, and police. In addition, there is Brcko District, a self-governing administrative unit. Overarching these entities is a centralised government with a rotating three-member presidency. Annex four of the Dayton accord sets out the constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Most citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina self-identify with an ethnic profile that is often linked to a particular religion. The last time the ethnic profile was documented (in the 2013 census) the distribution was as follows: Bosniaks 50.11 percent; Serbs 30.78 percent; Croats 15.43 percent; Others 2.73 percent; undeclared 0.77 percent; no answer 0.18 percent.¹

Bosnia-Herzegovina is a secular state with no state religion. The “Law on Freedom of the Religion and the Legal Position of the Churches and Religious Communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina” was adopted in 2004.² This law provides for freedom of religion, ensures the legal status of churches and religious communities, and prohibits any form of discrimination against any religious group. It also provides the basis for the relationship between the state and religious communities.

The above-mentioned law also mandates that a register of all religious groups be kept at the Ministry of Justice, while the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees is tasked with documenting violations of religious freedom.

The law recognises four traditional religious communities and churches: the Islamic Community, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish Community.

According to the law, any group of 300 adult citizens may register to be recognised as a new church or religious community by applying in writing to the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Justice should issue a decision within 30 days of the application, and an appeal may be made to the Council of Ministers.

The law reaffirms the right of every citizen to religious education. Official representatives of the various churches and religious communities have responsibility for teaching Religious Studies in all public and private preschools, primary schools and universities. Republika Srpska will introduce mandatory religion classes for all high school students. The new religious curriculum will start in September 2018, when the new school year begins.³

The Basic Agreement between the Holy See and Bosnia-Herzegovina was signed on 19th April 2006. The joint commission for implementation of the concordat made gradual progress, but the agreement did not enter into force because the government and parliament remained unwilling to implement the Catholic Church's proposals, including specific legislation on observing religious holidays.⁴ In April 2010 the "Catholic Members of the Country's Armed Forces Pastoral Care Agreement" was signed.

The Basic Agreement between the State and the Serbian Orthodox Church was signed on 3rd December 2007.

On 6th January 2010, the Islamic Community submitted its draft proposal for its own agreement with the state. In 2015 the draft proposal was approved by Council of Ministers and sent to the Presidency for final approval, but the final text is still being negotiated. Although the major objections to the agreement have never been made public, it is believed that the Presidency cannot agree whether to use the term "respect" or "guarantee" within certain articles of the agreement.⁵

Today almost every Islamic group is present in Bosnia-Herzegovina, from the followers of Said Nursî to Salafis, Islamic Revivalists and supporters of Abu Hamza al-Masri, at least on the internet. Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Indonesia, etc. have had mosques constructed in Sarajevo and other cities. Qatar and UAE assisted with the reconstruction of the buildings of the University of Sarajevo's Faculty of Islamic Studies and Gazi Husrev Bey's Library.⁶ The King Fahd Mosque, built by the Saudis in 2000, is the largest Muslim holy place in the Balkans. Most of the new construction contrasts sharply with traditional Ottoman stone mosques, with low, rounded domes and a single monumental minaret. According to recent data published by the Islamic Community, there are 1,912 mosques in the country of which 554 were built after the end of the war.⁷

The influence of Wahhabi Islam originates with foreign fighters who arrived during the war in the 1990s to fight alongside the Bosnian Muslims and never left. They are financed by Saudi charitable foundations.⁸ Over the last 15 years, there have been clashes between the moderate, local community and outsiders with more radical views of Islam. The current head of the Islamic community, Husein Kavazovic, was placed under police protection after receiving a death threat from a member of Daesh (ISIS). Reports suggest a number of Muslim religious leaders have become more radicalised, largely as a reaction to the inadequate international response to the plight of the Muslims in the country.⁹

In mid-January 2016, the Riyasat, the main body representing the Islamic Community, called for the dissolution of parallel Muslim communities which had been illegally set up in the country. It called on members of those communities to integrate into the legal structures in line with Bosnian legislation on religious communities. An estimated 64

illegal Islamic organisations are active in the country and are regarded as hotbeds of radicalism and extremism. The Riyasat has distanced itself from these communities, stating that it has no information about what is going on in these bodies and cannot be held responsible for their activities.

According to state officials and media sources approximately 260 citizens have joined fundamentalist groups as fighters in Iraq and Syria since 2013. It is estimated that 150 have returned. Vedran Dzihic, a Balkan expert at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs, has stated that they represent a serious security threat.¹⁰

The Roman Catholic Church is a religious minority in the country. There has been a significant emigration of Catholics, especially younger members. The Catholic Church is facing a very uncertain future. According to Cardinal Vinko Puljic, Archbishop of Vrhbosna, up to 10,000 Catholics leave Bosnia-Herzegovina every year.¹¹ The Diocese of Banja Luka in Republika Srpska, has fewer than 10,000, mostly elderly, Catholics compared to 200,000 before the war. Today, the lack of employment opportunities, a sense of political inaction and rising Islamic radicalism have triggered another wave of emigration. According to Bishop Franjo Komarica, the head of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Catholic Croats have not received any help from funds provided by the international community to enable former refugees to return.¹²

Unlike many of their Catholic and Muslim counterparts who stayed in Serb-held areas until they were forced out by "ethnic cleansing," most Serbian Orthodox bishops and priests fled areas under Croatian and Bosnian control early in the war.¹³

The foundation of an Inter-religious Council in 1997 was a turning point in the history of religion in the country. It aims to provide an authentic basis for mutual esteem, cooperation and freedom in the country. During Pope Francis's visit on 6th June 2015 to Sarajevo, he emphasised the importance of dialogue during an interfaith meeting. The Pope encouraged Catholics to work in solidarity with all ethnic and religious groups in the country to create lasting peace. He suggested interreligious dialogue should not be left to religious leaders alone, but should "extend as far as possible to all believers, engaging the different sectors of civil society."¹⁴

Unlike in other former Yugoslavian countries, the country's Parliament still has not adopted legal provisions for the restitution of property. To date, a very low percentage of property has been returned to the Jewish Community, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church and the Islamic Community of Bosnia Herzegovina.¹⁵

Incidents

Against the background of growing tension and lack of progress in interfaith understanding described above, several incidents have taken place.

In May 2017 unknown perpetrators raised an Islamist group's flag in the Croatian Catholic village of Ljubac near Tuzla in the north eastern part of the country. The flag of the "Caucasus Emirate" terrorist movement raised fear and tensions among Croat inhabitants. A

few weeks before, in the same village, unknown vandals wrote pro-Daesh (ISIS) messages on a local school building.¹⁶

While dozens of mosques have been built in the capital Sarajevo, no planning permission was granted for Christian churches. The authorities are still refusing to return hundreds of Church buildings, despite a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights. After 22 years struggling with local authorities, Catholics in Drvar, in the south-western part of the country, still have no church or graveyard. Despite numerous promises, the municipal authorities refuse to allocate land for the construction of a new church. The parish priest, Father Davor Klecina, asked his bishop Monsignor Franjo Komarica for permission to start a fundraising campaign for the purchase of suitable, privately- owned land for construction. Mass is currently celebrated in a hall in the city centre. Most of the city's Catholic faithful are people from the centre of the country who were displaced by the war. Catholic Church officials in Banja Luka also reported the continued refusal of municipal authorities to return any of their appropriated properties, even after the authorities returned most of the previously seized property to the Serbian Orthodox Church.¹⁷

In January 2018 Kiseljak Municipal Court sentenced Miljenko Golub to six months in jail for assaulting a woman in a local petrol station just because she was wearing a hijab.¹⁸

In February 2018 Nedžad Latic, the editor of The Bosnia Times website, was attacked by a group of men that he described as "Wahhabis". He claimed that the men assaulted him after he was leaving a local Sarajevo mosque having finished his prayers. The Bosnian journalists' association called police and judicial institutions for an urgent investigation.¹⁹

In February 2018 Travnik Cantonal Court dismissed the appeal by the Travnik Mixed School against an order to surrender the school building to its owner, the Archdiocese of Vrhbosna. The court also ordered Travnik Mixed School to pay a fee for past usage, which amounted to KM 270,368 (US\$ 173,168). The court ruling came after more than 15 years of litigation. In 2003, the country's Human Rights Chamber had ruled that the property must be returned to the Catholic School but the decision was never implemented. It remains to be seen whether the 2018 court decision will be upheld.²⁰

In April 2018, a municipal court in Livno sentenced seven people of Croatian nationality to one year's probation for committing hate crimes based on religion and nationality, and vandalising religious and private property in Omerovici village near Tomislavgrad in the southwestern part of the country. According to the indictment, on 15th August 2015, the perpetrators, after getting severely drunk in local bars, threatened to demolish the village mosque. They drove into the village, left a gas cylinder in front of the mosque, and, after threatening local inhabitants and vandalising several private cars, they drove away.²¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

Bosnia-Herzegovina continues to face immense political, economic and social problems that will seriously influence the freedom of religion of its citizens in the foreseeable future. All ethnic and religious communities are affected, and the lack of political will makes

it impossible to believe that there will be an improvement of the situation or that the country will become better integrated.

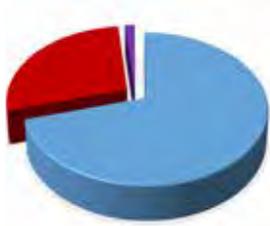
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BOTSWANA

RELIGION



- Christians: 70,5%
- Ethnoreligionists: 28%
- Others: 1,5%



AREA	POPULATION
581.730km ²	2.304.100

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Constitution of the Republic of Botswana¹ of 1966, amended in 1994 and 1997, guarantees “freedom of conscience”, which includes “freedom of thought and of religion, freedom to change his or her religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate his or her religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance” (article 11). In section 2, it continues: “Every religious community shall be entitled, at its own expense, to establish and maintain places of education and to manage any place of education which it wholly maintains; and no such community shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for persons of that community in the course of any education provided at any place of education which it wholly maintains or in the course of any education which it otherwise provides.” It finally states (section 3) that “Except with his or her own consent (or, if he or she is a minor, the consent of his or her guardian) no person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if that instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his or her own.”

Religious groups must register with the Registrar of Societies at the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, but the process is usually simple and only takes a few months. There are no particular legal benefits for registered organisations. That said, unregistered religious groups cannot sign contracts, conduct business or open bank accounts.

In March 2015, the government raised the minimum membership threshold for registration for new religious groups from 10 to 250 members. Previously registered groups were not affected by the amendment.²

The government observes the following religious holy days as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas Day. Although the country only recognises Christian holidays, members of other religious groups are allowed to observe their feasts without government interference.

Botswana is predominantly Christian, but it is home to important religious minorities such as Baha'is, Muslims (mostly of South Asian origin) and Hindus, usually migrant foreign

workers. A growing percentage of the population that is nominally Christian appears to adhere to no religious beliefs. The government acknowledges religious pluralism and encourages inter-religious dialogue and cooperation.

Incidents

During the reporting period, no serious incidents or acts of intolerance, discrimination or persecution against any religious group were observed. This notwithstanding, on 10th January 2018 the media reported that the government had withdrawn registration for the Enlightened Christian Gathering Church International. The government issued a public statement that the Church had failed to respond to an official letter asking Church leaders to explain why they solicit “miracle money”, regarded as illegal by the state authorities. Likewise, other groups linked to the Church were also ordered to cease their operations. Local and international media reported that the Church is led by Pastor Bushiri, a renowned religious leader in southern Africa famous for his preaching style involving make-believe miracles.³

Prospects for freedom of religion

Botswana is one of the few African countries which have had a well-established democracy since independence, where there is a strong tradition of rule of law and respect for basic human rights, including religious freedom. The country is likely to continue along this path. Similarly, there are no signs of a breakdown in respect for religious minorities and continuing peaceful relations between faith groups. The aforementioned incident involving the Enlightened Christian Gathering Church International appears to be primarily an issue of fraud and law enforcement.

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BRAZIL

RELIGION



- Christians: 90,8%
- Agnostics: 2,6%
- Spiritists: 4,8%
- Others: 1,8%



AREA	POPULATION
8.515.767km ²	209.568.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Freedom of belief and worship is guaranteed in articles five and 19 of the current Brazilian constitution, promulgated in 1988. Law No. 7716 of 1989 establishes as a crime discrimination based on race, colour, ethnicity, religion or nationality. Public policies aimed at combating discrimination began with racial issues, followed by gender and, more recently, religious issues. Since 1989, there has been a federal agency responsible for implementing public policies against discrimination (current Ministry of Human Rights). In 2015, the Office of Religious Diversity and Human Rights was created, a public agency dedicated to religious discrimination.

However, with the federal government and many state governments facing financial crisis, these public agencies defending religious freedom have been downsized or closed. For example, in 2016 the Centre for the Promotion of Religious Freedom and Human Rights was closed in Rio de Janeiro, the state with the largest problems concerning religious intolerance. Its services were assumed by other bodies which defend human rights.¹

In addition, Brazil continues to see conflicts at a governmental level regarding the concept of secularism and its application in public policy. The dispute is similar to that found in other Western countries and is mainly concerned with topics such as abortion, gay marriage and confessional religious education.² An issue came up concerning the growing presence of Neo-Pentecostal missionaries in prisons. This is prompting advocates of secularism to call for rules that limit the presence of religious ministers in Brazilian penitentiaries.³

In the case of confessional religious education, the Supreme Court, responding to an action by the Federal Prosecutor's Office, decided that religious education in Brazilian public schools may be confessional in nature, reflecting the various religions present in Brazil.⁴

Certain social controversies are not intrinsically religious in nature. That said, they are affected by religious issues and generate renewed antagonism among religious groups. They tend to deepen in response to the increased political polarisation taking place in Brazil, prompted by political corruption scandals. One of the strongest legislative groups is the "Bullet, Beef and Bible" caucus, with electoral support from evangelical Churches and linked to large political interest groups.⁵

Incidents

During the period covered by this report, two studies with quantitative data on religious intolerance in Brazil were published: the report from the Human Rights and Religious Diversity Office of the Ministry of Human Rights⁶, with data from 2011 to 2015, and another from Dial 100⁷ (a national system that receives complaints by phone), with data from 2011 to 2016. In both cases, the variation in the number of occurrences recorded over the years mainly reflects the degree of the population's awareness about the matter in question. This in turn depends heavily on the existence of awareness campaigns.⁸

Throughout the period under review, the most attacked religious community was the Afro-Brazilian. Depending on the source of the data, this community represents about 41.5 percent to 63.3 percent of the victims who gave their religion when registering their complaint, although Afro-Brazilians are only 0.3 percent of the country's total population.⁹ Comparatively, the number of attacks on small religious communities considered esoteric (Wicca, Stregheria, Santo Daime, etc.) is also high. These communities suffered about 4 percent of the attacks in 2016. In their case, they make up less than 0.4 percent of the population.

Recently, Muslims have also been attacked frequently – 0.71 percent of the attacks in 2016, despite being only 0.02 percent of the population.¹⁰ The Dial 100 statistics report, for this period, only three cases of intolerance in relation to Judaism. This data bank does not give details about the incidents, only that there was a complaint. It represents 0.4 percent of the total cases registered in the Dial 100. Jews represent 0.5 percent of the Brazilian population. In conclusion, the Jewish community reports a relatively low number of complaints of religious harassment.

The most frequent attacks are of two types: (1) verbal or physical aggression against people who are important and recognised in their religious community or who carry religious props and symbols; (2) vandalism of sacred spaces and destruction of religious objects. Personal assaults are most common in public areas or in the victim's own house.¹¹

Cases of discrimination in the workplace have been frequently reported in Brazil. Generally, victims are employees who wear religious garments and vestments (such as white clothing and ornaments in the case of Afro-Brazilian religions and veils in the case of Muslims). In the city of Mesquita, in Rio de Janeiro State, a young man was immediately dismissed when he went to work in the City Hall dressed in traditional Afro-Brazilian vestments and wearing other religious ornaments.¹²

According to followers of Afro-Brazilian religions, criminal organisations have carried out an increasing number of attacks against them in recent years. The problem dates back to the 1990s, but it was hardly visible as the victims were afraid to report the attacks. Recently, however, occurrences are becoming more frequent and visible. They report that former gang members and drug dealers, that they have converted to neo-Pentecostal religions, and that they prohibit the practice of Afro-Brazilian religions in areas dominated by their former organisations.¹³

Although they are not very common, cases of religious discrimination in the media regularly take place in Brazil. By 2015, two TV networks were convicted for exhibiting shows offensive to Afro-Brazilian religions.¹⁴ In 2016, an Evangelical newspaper was denounced for publishing an article titled “Names of the Demons and in what area of life they act”, describing some demons with names of entities related to Afro-Brazilian religions.¹⁵ Also in that year in Brazil, Google was ordered to remove 23 videos taken from a channel entitled “Murderous Islamism”, for instigating intolerance and religious persecution.¹⁶

Acts of religious persecution against indigenous tribes are rare and are generally associated with land demarcation issues. Attacks on places of worship, in these cases, has the purpose of scaring and forcing the departure of the indigenous populations from their territories, as happened with the Pankará people, in the Serra do Arapuá, Northeastern Brazil.¹⁷

Cases of intolerance and religious discrimination have often reflected problems of understanding and application of the principles of the secular state, at a time of great political and social antagonism in Brazil. For example, in the city of Londrina, southern Brazil, during the celebrations of Independence Day (7th September) of 2016, there was a theatre play that included a representation of Afro-Brazilian religions. A city councilor posted on Facebook: “MACUMBA IN FRONT OF THE CITY COUNCIL. If it was a Christian service or a Mass, these same people would now be yelling that the State is secular.” The comment was considered discriminatory because “macumba” is a pejorative term to refer to Afro-Brazilian religions and the cultural manifestation was not a religious service.¹⁸

On the other hand, the councilor’s comment conveys a perception, real or imagined, of the existence of veiled discrimination against Christian religions by saying that if the play included a representation of a Christian service, then people would immediately protest in the name of secularism. With the process of growing polarisation underway in Brazilian society, traditional Christian groups and extremists can assume intolerant and aggressive attitudes toward other religions, particularly against Afro-Brazilians. As anthropologist, João Baptista Borges Pereira, a retired professor at the University of São Paulo, observes, a religion “may be intolerant because it wants to dominate or because it is a victim of intolerance”.¹⁹

During the period under review, the federal government carried out three initiatives to combat religious intolerance: the national campaign “Sons of Brazil” to combat violence and religious intolerance (2016), also the combat against religious intolerance was the theme for the National High School Exam (2016), and the National Day to Combat Religious Intolerance (21st January) was observed. In Brazil there are also frequent activities in defence of religious freedom promoted by inter-faith groups that congregate Catholics, Evangelicals, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, spiritualists and members of Afro-Brazilian religions.²⁰

In this period, an embarrassing situation occurred involving Father Fábio de Melo, a priest and singer who is very well-known in Brazilian social media. Speaking at a Mass, and subsequently available on YouTube, he made speeches considered offensive to the Afro-Brazilian religions. He referred to them using the pejorative term “macumba” and declared that he could even eat the foods offered to the deity in the rituals – a gesture

considered a profanation by the faithful of these religions. This incident came at a time when the Catholic hierarchy in Brazil has been speaking out against violence and religious intolerance towards Afro-Brazilian religions. Father Fábio de Melo eventually apologised on Twitter and pledged to dialogue with believers who felt offended.²¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

A general overview of religious freedom in Brazil retains the same characteristics observed in the previous period under review (2014-16). These are: (1) fragility of Afro-Brazilian religious communities, (2) violence against Muslims, although this is rare because they make up a small proportion of the population, (3) greater aggressiveness by Neo-Pentecostal communities towards other religions.

The main changes that occurred in this context can be attributed to the current economic, political and moral crisis. The lack of financial resources tends to reduce investment in social programmes intended to defend human rights. This is all the more applicable to areas where the local population has little awareness of religious freedom problems. On the other hand, the growing polarisation of society tends to involve religious groups. This in turn causes increasing conflict both within the faith communities themselves and between them and the state.

Brazil is not a country with serious religious conflict, but the current data indicates that economic and political developments are having an impact on the importance being attached to fundamental human rights. This is a trend that will almost certainly continue in the foreseeable future.

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BRUNEI

RELIGION



- Muslims: 58,5%
- Christians: 12,2%
- Ethnoreligionists: 10,1%
- Buddhists: 9,7%
- Chinese Folk Religionists: 5,3%
- Confucianists: 1,9%
- Agnostics: 1,1%
- Others: 1,2%



AREA
5.765km²

POPULATION
429.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Brunei is the only sovereign state on the island of Borneo. The rest of the island is divided between Malaysia and Indonesia. The Bruneian Empire declined during the nineteenth century and the country became a British Protectorate in 1888. The Japanese occupied the country during the Second World War. A new constitution was written in 1959 followed by independence from Britain in 1984.

Under article two of the constitution,¹ the official religion of Brunei is Islam “according to the Shafeite sect of Ahlis Sunna Waljamaah”, which is one of the four schools of Sunni Islamic law. Article three of the constitution also provides that “all other religions may be practised in peace and harmony by the persons professing them”.

The government actively promotes the national philosophy of Melayu Islam Beraja (the “Malay Islamic Monarchy”) through the body known as the Supreme Council. Among its other aims, the council seeks to strengthen the daily practice of Islam among the people of Brunei and to ensure that this is reflected in the country’s legislation and policies. Islamic authorities actively promote and seek to propagate the Shafeite form of Sunni Islam.

Brunei’s civil and Shari’a courts operate in parallel. Shari’a courts hear criminal, family and other civil cases. They apply longstanding Shari’a legislation as well as the new Shari’a Penal Code, the first phase of which was enacted in 2014.

In many cases, non-Muslims are subject to Shari’a as are Muslims. Various kinds of behaviour seen as inimical to the Islamic culture of Brunei are prohibited and subject to criminal sanctions which apply to all. These prohibitions include drinking alcohol and eating in public during the hours of the Ramadan fast. They are routinely enforced by means of warnings and raids. Non-Muslims are not subject to some of the specific requirements of Islamic piety, such as Friday prayers and the obligation of zakat (alms giving).

There are wide-ranging legal provisions which protect the official religion in other respects. Propagation of a religion other than Islam is a criminal offence punishable by a custodial sentence not exceeding five years, a fine not exceeding 20,000 BND (around US\$15,000) or both. No missionaries are reported to be working in the country. Any act

which “tends to tarnish the image of Islam” is likewise a criminal offence. It is also illegal to criticise the Shari'a Penal Code. Public celebrations of Christmas, including putting up decorations and singing carols, have been banned since 2015 on the grounds that they could damage the “aqidah (beliefs) of the Muslim community”.² Likewise, there was a tightening of restrictions on the celebration of seasonal Chinese religious events.

All religious organisations are required by law to apply for registration and to provide detailed information about themselves, their activities, the names of their members and any other information which the registrar may require. Without registration, organisations are unable to operate. The registrar may deny registration at his own absolute discretion. Failure to register may lead to a charge of unlawful assembly and result in a fine. Participation in an unregistered organisation is punishable under criminal law, including by a custodial sentence not exceeding three years. Strictly speaking, any public assembly of five persons or more, including for the purpose of worship, requires official permission. Religious assemblies, however, are generally treated as though they were private gatherings. The Catholic and Anglican Churches are officially recognised.

Attempts to expand or renovate buildings operated by non-Muslim religious groups are constrained and, as a result, facilities are often too small or otherwise inadequate. There are only a handful of churches in Brunei, as well as a small number of Buddhist or Daoist temples and two Hindu temples. While Churches and Church-run private schools may in principle repair their sites and do undertake such works, it is reported that in practice the approval process is lengthy, complex and subject to delays. There is a fatwa discouraging Muslims from assisting non-Muslims in sustaining their beliefs and this also inhibits work on non-Muslim facilities. The government uses zoning laws to prevent people from using private homes as places of worship. It is reported that the government will no longer issue permits for the construction of churches.

Criminal investigations into religious behaviour are led mainly by the Religious Enforcement Division of the Bruneian Ministry of Religious Affairs. The government regularly reports prosecutions brought against those ignore Islamic legal prescriptions such as Ramadan, the ban on alcohol and khalwat (a Sufi practice). Various kinds of administrative penalties, including travel bans, are also imposed on those accused of such crimes against Islam.

The government has banned outright a number of religions. These include the Ahmadiyya form of Islam, Al Arqam (a Malaysian-based Islamic sect), the Bahai faith and the Jehovah's Witnesses. The bans originate in fatwas issued by the State Mufti or the Islamic Religious Council. Muslims who wish to renounce their faith may do so at present, but must formally notify the Islamic Religious Council.

Schools administered by the Ministry of Religious Education or the Ministry of Religious Affairs provide Islamic religious education. In these schools, Islamic education is compulsory for resident Muslim children. The government reports that many non-Muslim students choose to participate in Islamic education as well. Muslim parents are also required to enrol their children in schools which provide ugama (supplemental religious education). If

they fail to do so, they may be fined or imprisoned for up to one year. In schools, teaching materials do not cover other faiths.

Private Church schools are recognised by the Ministry of Education and accept pupils of any religion, Schools (including Church-run private schools) are not permitted to teach religions other than Shafeite Islam; failure to comply may result in criminal penalties. No provision is made for the teaching of other forms of Islam. Faiths other than Islam may be taught only in private contexts, such as family homes or state-approved Churches.

The importation and distribution of religious literature is also closely regulated by law. The government strictly controls the importation of Bibles and other non-Muslim religious writings. Audio-visual material for television or film is censored. Images of religious symbols, such as crosses, in magazine articles are routinely redacted.

Friday sermons in all mosques are the same. They are prepared by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and delivered by state-registered imams. The government has warned the population against other forms of Islam, such as liberal Islam, Salafism and Wahhabism. The approach to Islam in the country is sometimes justified as a bulwark against extremism.

Most official meetings open with Islamic prayers. Businesses are closed during Friday prayers and restaurants do not serve food during the fasting hours of Ramadan. Residents are required to carry identity cards, which, in practice, are used to identify the religion of the bearer. Visitors to the country are asked to specify their religion when making a visa application.

The press in Brunei fairly regularly carries stories of conversion to the Shafeite school of Islam. Such conversions are incentivised by the state, which provides those who change their religion with benefits such as welfare payments, new homes, generators, water pumps or sums of money to enable them to undertake the Hajj. These incentives are aimed especially at indigenous groups in rural areas, but both foreigners and native Bruneians are among the converts. Although in theory a Muslim may marry a non-Muslim in Brunei, weddings are conducted by state-approved imams who require the non-Muslim party to convert before they will officiate at the ceremony.

Incidents

Incidents

The fact that the press in Brunei is not free and practises self-censorship when discussing politics and religion limits open discussion of liberty of belief in the country.

There are reports that both Muslims and non-Muslims feel the pressure to conform to Islamic norms of behaviour, both because of specific legal prohibitions and societal pressures. It is reported, for example, that Muslim women feel pressure to wear the tudong (head covering) even where it is not specifically required. Non-Muslims say that they feel under pressure to convert to Islam and Muslims who would like to practise a different religion say they are concerned about the social consequences.

Some Church leaders say that not insignificant numbers of Muslims have expressed willingness to allow other religions to celebrate their own feasts. Members of the Christian community report that they practise a form of self-censorship when it comes to the public articulation of their faith. Christians believe that they face discrimination in the workplace and for this reason they are absent from top positions in the government.

Attempts to proselytise in the past have led to detention, sometimes without charges. In the period under review, no reports of detention for proselytising have been reported. There are occasional expressions of hostility towards Christians on social media in Brunei.

Prospects for freedom of religion

The next phases in the implementation of the Shari'a Penal Code (SPC), which have been under discussion for several years, have not yet come into effect. There is widespread international concern about the code's full application since it includes the death penalty and various kinds of corporal punishment, including amputation of hands for theft and stoning for sodomy. Criticisms have sometimes been trenchantly rejected by the Sultan. Full implementation would also mean further, stringent limitations on religious freedom. For example, apostasy from Islam is punishable by execution, as is contempt for the Prophet Muhammad or insulting the Qur'an.

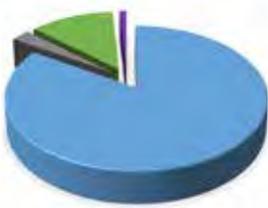
The implementation of the SPC involves three phases. The second phase will not come into effect until a year after the publication of the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC). In March 2018, it was reported that the Islamic Religious Council had approved a draft of the CPC and that the Sultan had consented to its publication in the Brunei Government Gazette.³ Further details are awaited. Prospects for freedom of religion are, therefore, dire for everyone.

Endnotes

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BULGARIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 84%
- Agnostics: 2,7%
- Muslims: 12,3%
- Others: 1%



BULGARIA

AREA	POPULATION
111.002km ²	7.098.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution of Bulgaria¹ upholds freedom of religion or belief in Articles 13 and 37, which establish protections for all religions, recognises the Eastern Orthodox Church as the “traditional religion” of the country, and bans the use of religion for violent or political ends.

These protections are codified in the Religious Denominations Act (Durzhaven vestnik n.120/29.12.2002), which provides measures for the legal recognition of religious denominations and communities. Registration is required for all groups if they want to engage in public worship; the one exception being the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, whose status as the traditional Church of the republic precludes the need to register.² There are currently 156 registered religious groups.³

According to Article 6 of the Religious Denominations Act, registration allows religious groups not only to worship in public, but also to rent or own land, hold a bank account, distribute religious material, share their beliefs in public spaces, establish and operate charities or other humanitarian organisations, run educational institutions, collect donations, and maintain connections with like-minded people and institutions abroad.⁴

In the last few years, there have been attempts to reduce the rights of certain minority religious communities. A “burqa ban” targeting all face coverings in public was adopted by the National Assembly in September 2016 and schools have banned the wearing of all religious symbols, including the hijab and the cross.⁵ These measures have caused tensions with the Bulgarian Muslim community.

On 26th May 2017, a proposal was presented to the newly elected parliament, in particular by the far-right political coalition “United Patriots Front” and extreme nationalists, to change to the Penal Code so as to criminalise Islam. These groups blamed terrorism on radical Islam and equated Islam with ideologies such as fascism.⁶

In early December 2017, Bulgarian lawmakers approved the first reading of the Bill to Amend and Supplement the Penal Code” (88 in favour, 22 opposed and 50 abstentions). If passed, the bill would criminalise “the propagation of radical Islam and coercing or

inducing another [person] to wear clothing partially concealing or completely hiding the face".⁷ It would also impose jail terms of up to four years and fines from 5,000 to 10,000 leva "for coercing or inducing another to wear clothing partially concealing or completely hiding the face through the use of threats, violence, coercion, public status or authority or by promising to give a benefit".⁸

In addition to these legislative changes, extreme nationalists in parliament are also preparing other changes to the Law of the Religions, which stipulates that preaching in churches and other religious temples should only be in the Bulgarian language.⁹

Some local authorities persist in discriminating against particular minority religious groups. Much of this is due to the influence of right-wing movements such as the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (VMRO) and the National Front of Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB), and the relative effectiveness of their local level campaigning. As of the autumn of 2017, more than 40 municipalities featured such ordinances.¹⁰

There have been several bans on proselytising on a local level, only to be overturned by higher courts due to their unconstitutionality. This has been a particular issue for Jehovah's Witnesses.¹¹

Incidents

Jehovah's Witnesses have reported abuse or harassment on several occasions in the past few years. Usually this is restricted to incidents involving the VMRO and NFSB or the local population. These two political parties have participated in campaigns targeting not just the Witnesses but all members of non-Eastern Orthodox Churches practising their faith in public.

In 2017 members of the VMRO harassed Witnesses in Elhovo, Mezdra, and other cities with total impunity. In Lom, Pernik, Popovo and Vratsa, Witnesses were the victims of further harassment or vandalism by unaffiliated members of the public.¹²

The Muslim community in Bulgaria is increasingly concerned about hate-motivated incidents perpetrated against Muslims and Islamic holy sites, while acts of vandalism against mosques and sites for worship have become frequent.¹³

The Office of the Grand Mufti records incidents of hate crime against Islamic buildings and other centres.

On the night of 7th February 2017, unknown attackers vandalised a mosque in the town of Silistra. They fired a 5.5-millimetre air rifle into the security cameras and lighting fixtures of the mosque. Similar damage was noticed on the facade of the mosque. The Board of Trustees of the mosque filed a complaint with the police in Silistra.

Another incident occurred in May 2017 against the mosque in Plovdiv.

On 28th May 2017, the second day of Ramadan, football fans attacked and vandalised the Sofia mosque with beer bottles and drink cans. They verbally attacked Muslims outside the mosque. Nearby policemen were accused of failing to respond to pleas for assistance.

Though there have been several anti-Semitic incidents in Bulgaria in recent years, often linked to the growing popularity of the far right, these remain largely contained. Such incidents have taken several forms: marches and demonstrations by neo-Nazis and other hate groups, and acts of vandalism against synagogues, cemeteries and other Jewish community buildings. In September 2017, several headstones were pushed to the ground at a Jewish cemetery in Sofia.¹⁴ The violence was condemned by leading government officials and pledges made to arrest the perpetrators.

The annual Lukov March through Sofia every February commemorates Bulgaria's alliance with Nazi Germany and the assassination of Hristo Lukov, the leader of Bulgaria's pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic Union of Bulgarian National Legions, during the Second World War. They have been held for the past three years despite a municipal ban.¹⁵

Prospects for freedom of religion

Bulgaria is an Orthodox-majority country, where large religious minority groups have faced constant intolerance. Posing the greatest threat to religious tolerance in Bulgaria is the current rise in far-right sentiment and activism fuelled by the VMRO and the NFSB. This is exacerbated by the recent migrant crisis, and the preferential treatment shown to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

Social discrimination has made it increasingly difficult for minority religious groups to carry out their activities peacefully.

Despite these setbacks, Bulgaria has made some progress in boosting its law enforcement agencies and courts to deal with hate crimes and other forms of discriminatory behaviour.¹⁶

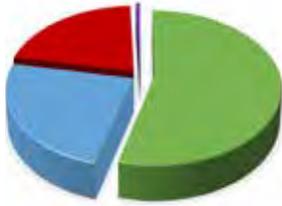
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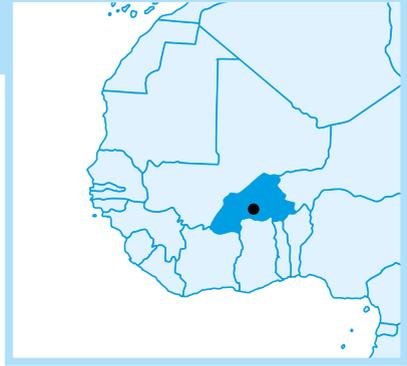
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BURKINA FASO

RELIGION



● Muslims: 54,2%
● Christians: 23,9%
● Ethnoreligionists: 21,3%
● Others: 0,6%



AREA	POPULATION
272.967km ²	18.634.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution of the Republic of Burkina Faso defines the country as a secular state that grants no privileges to any religious denomination and guarantees its citizens freedom of religion.¹ Like many other nations in the region, Burkina Faso is characterised by great religious diversity, with Muslims in the clear majority.²

It remains to be seen whether violent Islamist groups, coming mainly from Mali but also from other West African states, will gain a permanent foothold in Burkina Faso. The various religious communities in the country have traditionally maintained good relations with one another.

Religious groups may register with the authorities but are not required to do so. Those that do are subject to the same legal requirements as apply to other (secular) organisations.³

Religious instruction is not permitted in state-run schools. The country also has Muslim, Catholic and Protestant primary and secondary schools. Educational facilities have free reign in personnel matters, but the appointment of headmasters must be reported to the authorities.⁴ The government reviews the curricula of religious schools for religious orientation and compliance with professional standards. But, since many Quranic schools in Burkina Faso are not registered, state control is far from exhaustive.⁵

Muslim, Catholic, Protestant and animist communities receive government subsidies equivalent to approximately US\$ 120,000 each year. They also receive assistance for various programmes and projects that, in the government's view, promote the common good or the national interest in the field of education.

A commission is currently working on the draft of a new Constitution.

Incidents

There have been relatively few jihadist attacks in Burkina Faso to date, but those that have occurred have been particularly violent. The West African country was still in the crosshairs of Islamist terrorism during the reporting period.

On 2nd March 2018 there was a series of coordinated attacks in the capital, Ouagadougou,⁶ including several cars and suicide bombers against the French Embassy and Burkinabé army headquarters. There were at least 16 dead and 100 injured. Claiming responsibility was the “Group to support Islam and Muslims” led by Malians and is linked to Al-Qaeda.

Previously, a terrorist attack on 16th January 2016 had left 30 people dead in a restaurant and hotel in Ouagadougou. Another restaurant in the city was attacked on 13th August 2017. The perpetrators indiscriminately fired machine guns at passers-by. The attack claimed the lives of 20 people.⁷ The target of the attack, Café Istanbul, was particularly popular with foreigners. According to the Burkinabé government, this was probably a jihadist terrorist attack.⁸

Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world. In the north, it borders on Mali, which has long battled Islamist extremists. According to experts, the threat of domestic terrorism is also on the rise in Burkina Faso. For instance, the radicalised preacher Ibrahim Malam Dicko has already claimed responsibility for attacks on soldiers and civilians. His organisation, Ansarul Islam, is classified as a terrorist group by the Government of Burkina Faso.⁹

The attack in January 2016, in which terrorists and numerous hostages were trapped for several hours in Hotel Splendid, was also claimed by another terrorist organisation called al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).¹⁰ There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the terrorists sought to use the attack as a show of strength in a country that, up until then, had been recognised and respected around the world for the peaceful coexistence of its various ethnic and religious groups.

In addition to Mali, Burkina Faso also shares borders with five other countries in West Africa: Niger, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Benin and Togo. There is a danger that crisis and political instability will spread to the entire region. Moreover, violent jihadist groups in West Africa are increasingly operating across national borders; these organisations include Boko Haram, a terrorist militia active mainly in Nigeria but responsible for attacks in Niger and Cameroon as well. From the north, the country is under threat from the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group.¹¹ The neighbour to the west, Mali, has been in a state of crisis for years, as Islamist terrorist groups wreak havoc in that country.¹² As a consequence, the small country of Burkina Faso is threatened by jihadism from virtually all sides.

In light of the transnational terrorist threat in the Sahel region, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad are working together with the French military to combat jihadism within their borders as part of “Operation Barkhane”. In February 2017, the same five West African countries agreed to establish a common counter-terrorism force.¹³

The Catholic Church in Burkina Faso and in neighbouring countries has, for a long time, actively promoted peace and reconciliation.¹⁴ Cardinal Philippe Ouédraogo, Archbishop of Ouagadougou, has called on people to face the security crisis in Burkina Faso with courage. He explained: “In this situation, all citizens are responsible for the future of the country.”

Prospects for freedom of religion

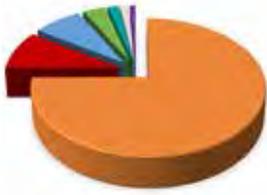
Following the election of the country's new president, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, a Catholic with extensive international experience, many people see signs of hope. The elections were peaceful and fair. President Kaboré took office on 29th December 2015.¹⁵ The terrorist attacks in 2016, 2017 and 2018 do not change fundamentally the country's optimistic attitudes with regard to the peaceful coexistence of religions. Meanwhile, winning the fight against jihadism will take time.

Endnotes

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BURMA/MYANMAR

RELIGION



●	Buddhists: 74,9%
●	Ethnoreligionists: 9,4%
●	Christians: 7,9%
●	Muslims: 3,7%
●	Hindus: 1,7%
●	Confucianists: 1,5%
●	Others: 0,9%



AREA	POPULATION
676.577km ²	54.363.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution in Burma (Myanmar), drafted by the military regime and introduced in 2008, protects freedom of religion for its citizens, declaring in article 34 that "Every citizen is equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess and practise religion subject to public order, morality or health and to the other provisions of this constitution."¹ Article 362 recognises "Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism as the religions existing in the Union at the day of the coming into operation of this constitution." However, article 361 recognises the "special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union."

Article 364 forbids "the abuse of religion for political purposes" and states that "any act which is intended or is likely to promote feelings of hatred, enmity or discord between racial or religious communities or sects is contrary to this constitution. A law may be promulgated to punish such activity."

In addition to the constitution, sections 295, 295A, 296, 297 and 298 of the Penal Code² relate to religion and prohibit religious offences or insults. They are similar to blasphemy laws in other countries. Section 295 relates to acts that destroy, damage or defile a place of worship; section 295A refers to insulting religion; section 296 refers to causing a disturbance at a religious gathering; section 297 relates to trespassing on a place of worship; and section 298 refers to insulting the religious feelings of a person. All these carry with them prison sentences and fines of between one and two years.

In 2015, the previous government of Burma introduced a package of four laws known as the "Protection of Race and Religion"³ laws, which remain in effect today. They include legislation that provides registration requirements for marriages between non-Buddhist men and Buddhist women, stipulating obligations to be observed by non-Buddhist husbands and penalties for non-compliance, and regulations on religious conversion and a requirement for conversions to be approved by a government body.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs' Department for the Perpetuation and Propagation of the Sasana (Buddhist teaching) oversees the government's relations with Buddhist monks and schools and the State Sangha Monk Coordination Committee (SSMNC) oversees the

nine religious orders approved in the country. The government bans any organisation of Buddhist monks other than the nine state-recognised monastic orders.⁴

Incidents

Since 2012, a major campaign of anti-Muslim hatred, discrimination and violence has swept the country, led by a militant Buddhist nationalist movement known as “Ma Ba Tha”, or the “Buddhist Committee for Protection of Race and Religion”.⁵ In June and October 2012, and again in October 2016 and August 2017, the predominantly Muslim Rohingya people were subjected to grave violence leaving hundreds of thousands displaced and many reports of killings, rapes, torture, arbitrary arrest and destruction of property. Although the initial violence in 2012 was predominantly instigated by the Buddhist Rakhine people, with collusion from the security forces, in 2016 and 2017 the Burma Army unleashed a major military offensive. The military’s attacks were reportedly in response to alleged attacks carried out on border guard posts by a new, armed Rohingya group known as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). Some reports indicate that ARSA was responsible for a massacre of Hindus.⁶

Approximately 688,000 people have fled Burma for Bangladesh since August 2017 as a result of what is now widely recognised as a campaign of ethnic cleansing by the Burma Army.⁷ This is in addition to 200,000 Rohingya refugees already in Bangladesh. Between August and November 2017, at least 354 villages were reportedly burnt down by the military.⁸ The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has described the crisis as “textbook ethnic cleansing”, while the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma has noted that it has “the hallmarks of genocide”, and the UK House of Commons International Development Committee has argued that it represents a “deliberate, state-sanctioned, long-term ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people”.⁹

For the Rohingyas, as for many of Burma’s other minority ethnic groups, religion, ethnicity and politics are closely interlinked and so, as the US State Department notes, it is difficult to categorise many incidents as being solely based on religion.¹⁰ However, without doubt religion is a major factor.

Yet although, in the words of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, “of the myriad religious freedom challenges the government of Burma (also known as Myanmar) confronted in 2017, the crisis in Rakhine State was the most exigent,” it was by no means the only one.¹¹ Religious and ethnic minorities throughout the country continued to face challenges. In April 2017 two madrasas were forcibly closed by the authorities in Yangon (Rangoon), under pressure from Buddhist nationalists. At least 21 villages in some parts of the country have been declared Muslim-free zones, and Muslims are facing increasing difficulty obtaining identity cards, renovating or rebuilding damaged mosques or gathering to pray.¹² In April 2018, seven Muslim men were sentenced to three months in jail for organising prayers in Tharkayta Township, in Yangon.¹³

Christians also face increasing restrictions in some areas, including what USCIRF describes as “bureaucratic hurdles and societal pressure that make it difficult to gather in public to worship or obtain permission to build churches”.¹⁴ For example, in December 2017 ethnic Chin Christians in Kan Thar Village Tract in Magwe Division received a letter from the local authorities informing them that a prayer gathering during the Christmas season was banned because it was going to take place in a private home.¹⁵

Christians in ethnic conflict areas, particularly Kachin State and northern Shan State, are sometimes targeted as part of the wider conflict. Since the ceasefire between the Burma Army and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) broke down in 2011 at least 66 churches have been destroyed, according to the Kachin Baptist Convention, and over 100,000 civilians remain displaced. In October 2017, two Kachin Baptists, Dumdaw Nawng Lat and Lang Jaw Gam Seng, were sentenced to prison terms of four years and three months and two years and three months respectively, for helping local journalists to visit the St Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Mong Ko after it had been bombed during an airstrike by the Burma military. They were released in a prisoner amnesty in April 2018.

Pressure on Buddhists working for religious freedom is also severe. In 2015 Htin Lin Oo, a Buddhist and a prominent member of the National League for Democracy, gave a speech in which he argued that Buddhist monks who incite hatred and violence are not acting consistently with the teachings of Buddhism. He was sentenced to two years in prison, under sections 295A and 298 of the Penal Code, for “insulting” Buddhism. In July 2017, the editor of Myanmar Now, Swe Win, was arrested for alleged online defamation after he criticised U Wirathu, the most prominent militant Buddhist nationalist monk.¹⁶

Interfaith activists are also experiencing greater challenges. Zaw Zaw Latt and Pwint Phyu Latt, both Muslims working to promote interfaith activities, were jailed in 2015, but in May 2017 then-President Htin Kyaw pardoned them and they were released, along with 259 other prisoners.¹⁷

Despite the climate of religious intolerance, Pope Francis’s visit to Burma in November 2017 was well received and he was able to celebrate an open-air Mass attended by at least 150,000 people. He met with Burma’s State Counsellor and de facto head of government Aung San Suu Kyi, the then-President Htin Kyaw and the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. On the advice of the local Church he did not use the name Rohingya publicly, as it is not accepted by the government and by many in society, but he raised concerns about their situation in private conversations and met Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, where he greeted them with the words: “The presence of God is also called Rohingya.” He asked them for forgiveness, saying: “Your tragedy is very hard, very big. We give you space in our hearts. [...] In the name of everyone, of those who persecute you, those who hurt you, and especially of the world’s indifference, I ask for your forgiveness.”¹⁸ He had previously spoken out several times, including in February 2017, when he asked people to pray “for our Rohingya brothers and sisters driven out of Myanmar ... They have been tortured, killed, simply because they carry on their traditions, their Muslim faith.”¹⁹ During his visit he met religious leaders from all communities, including the State Sangha Council of Buddhist monks, delivered a

speech to government officials, diplomats and civil society and repeatedly appealed for respect for religious freedom and human rights, and for peace, in all his public addresses.²⁰

In May 2018, the bishops of Burma met with Pope Francis in their ad limina visit. The bishops from dioceses in Kachin and northern Shan states urged the Pope to pray publicly for the victims of conflict in northern Burma²¹ and Burma's Cardinal Charles Maung Bo urged the Vatican to convene an international conference to address the plight of the Rohingyas.²² Later in May, Cardinal Bo led an international interfaith delegation from Religions for Peace to visit affected areas in Rakhine State and to meet Aung San Suu Kyi. They subsequently issued an open letter with an appeal for peace.²³

In an address to a conference on religious freedom in Asia organised by the Religious Freedom Institute in March 2018, Cardinal Bo said: "Extremism and nationalism have joined forces to produce a dangerous cocktail of hate and intolerance [...]. Those of us, of whatever religion or country, who believe in human dignity, human rights and religious freedom for all must unite to defend those values for everyone, everywhere. As I have said before, 'Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, as detailed in article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is perhaps the most precious and most basic freedom of all. Without the freedom to choose, practise, share and change your beliefs, there is no freedom.' [...] It is so important that we defend not only the rights of our own particular religious community, but the right to religious freedom for everyone, everywhere. [...] Let us work together to end violence, hatred and terror in our region, and to build a world where every man, woman, and child of every race and religion is recognised both as our fellow citizen and as our brother and sister in humanity. Let us build a world where hope is not an illusion, and where we can join hands, regardless of ethnicity or religion, in peace and solidarity. I pledge to renew my efforts to that end, and I extend my hand to any of my brothers and sisters of any race or religion who will join with me. Peace with justice is possible. Freedom of religion or belief for everyone is achievable. Unity in diversity – where we celebrate such diversity – must be our goal."²⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

As long as the military continues to hold real power, Buddhist nationalists are able to pursue their campaign of hatred and crimes against humanity continue with impunity, the prospects for protecting and promoting freedom of religion in Burma are bleak. Only if there is genuine democratisation, a true peace process, a sincere effort to promote reconciliation and inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue and harmony, and support and space for civil society and religious leaders to strengthen understanding of freedom of religion or belief within society, can there be any hope that Burma could be a truly multi-religious society that respects and celebrates pluralism and diversity.

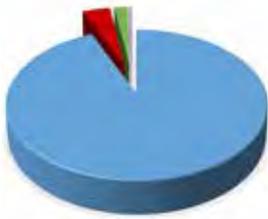
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BURUNDI

RELIGION



- Christians: 93,6%
- Ethnoreligionists: 4,1%
- Muslims: 2,1%
- Others: 0,2%



AREA	POPULATION
27.834km ²	11.553.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Constitution of Burundi of 2005¹ guarantees the right to freedom of expression, religion, thought, conscience and opinion (article 31), as well as the right to freedom of assembly and association and the right to create organisations according to the law (article 32).

The legal framework concerning matters of religious freedom is based on the same laws that govern non-profit associations (registration and operations), specifying that all religious groups must register at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and submit their statutes and a list with the names and curriculum vitae of the members of their board of governors. Once they receive approval from the ministry, they are free to carry out their activities.

Separation of Church and state is upheld in Burundi. All religious denominations are respected and are treated equally. The country's citizens have the right to convert to the religion of their choice without any restrictions. All religious groups have the right to engage in preaching, religious education, teaching in schools and running hospitals, as well as access to media including radio, television, newspapers and other journals. The state also guarantees the freedom to build places of worship.

Burundi is predominantly Christian. There is a Muslim minority, mostly Sunnis, who are concentrated in urban areas.

Incidents

During the period under review, Burundi continued to suffer from a political and social crisis that broke out in mid-2015 when President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to run for a third time in the presidential election of June of that year. At the time, the Catholic Church – most notably the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Burundi – joined many other voices from the political opposition and civil society to oppose Nkurunziza's move, which was seen as unconstitutional. In response, a number of high-ranking officials within the government and the ruling CNDD-FDD party² sharply criticised the Catholic bishops. However, after June 2016, no further verbal attacks against the Church were recorded.

Burundi's different religious denominations enjoy a high degree of freedom of worship. Several members of the clergy have privately indicated that Catholic bishops have shown greater restraint with regard to public statements on political matters. The clergy say this helps explain why there have been no major obstacles to religious activities held in the country.³

At the time of writing, a former chaplain at the University of Burundi and two other priests, who fled the country in April 2015, had yet to return to the country. The three fled after receiving anonymous death threats accusing them of supporting an insurgency against the government. In 2015, the chaplain had reportedly provided moral support to about 600 university students and helped them find temporary shelter.

President Pierre Nkurunziza and some of his closest aides are very active members of a born-again Pentecostal Church. Other government members belong to other religious denominations such as the Catholic Church and Islam. Several sources consulted in Burundi indicated that they saw no cases of discrimination on religious grounds with respect to public service employment.

The Muslim minority fully enjoys the right to freedom of worship. Many mosques have been built throughout the country, particularly in the last decade. Co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims is reported to be good.

Prospects for freedom of religion

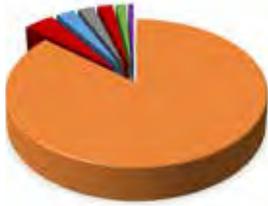
During the reporting period, the prospects for religious freedom in Burundi appear to have improved. Given the absence of serious religious freedom violations and the ease with which religious groups can worship and carry out charitable activities, it can be concluded that the exercise of this basic human right improved during the period under review and that this trend is likely to continue.

Endnotes

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CAMBODIA

RELIGION



- Buddhists: 86,2%
- Ethnoreligionists: 4,3%
- Christians: 2,7%
- Agnostics: 2,3%
- Chinese Folk Religionists: 2,2%
- Muslims: 1,5%
- Others: 0,8%



AREA	POPULATION
181.040km ²	15.827.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Located in the heart of south-east Asia, Cambodia is a constitutional monarchy. Its constitution, adopted on 21st September 1993, guarantees the right to religious freedom. Article 43 (paragraphs 1 and 2) reads as follows: "Khmer [Cambodian] citizens of either sex shall have the right to freedom of belief. Freedom of religious belief and worship shall be guaranteed by the state on the condition that such freedom does not affect other religious beliefs or violate public order and security."¹ At the same time, Cambodia is predominantly Buddhist, with most people practising Theravada Buddhism, a religion that occupies a central and dominant place in the life of the nation, something recognised by the constitution. Article 43 (paragraph 3) stipulates that "Buddhism shall be the religion of the State."² The basic law of the kingdom further specifies that the state supports the teaching of Buddhism. However, at the same time, it prohibits discrimination based on religious affiliation. Article 31 of the constitution lays down the principle of equality under the law: "Every Khmer citizen shall be equal before the law, enjoying the same rights, freedom and fulfilling the same obligations regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religious belief, political tendency, birth, origin, social status, wealth or other status."³

The law also stipulates that religious organisations must be registered with the authorities in order for them to carry out religious activities. Registration is made with the Ministry of Faiths and Religions. Thus, religious organisations must provide details about their aims, activities, the curriculum vitae of their leaders, and a description of their sources of funding. On an annual basis, they must provide a detailed account of their activities. The legislation in place further specifies that they must refrain from insulting other religious organisations, fuel disputes or harm national security. The registration process – which is relatively cumbersome as it has to be undertaken at the local, provincial and national levels – can last up to three months. Once registered with the Ministry of Faiths and Religions, religious organisations are eligible for tax exemptions from the Ministry of the Economy and Finance. While all of these measures may appear relatively complex, it should be noted that the Ministry of Faiths and Religions is not authorised to proceed against religious organisations that choose not to register, and the law does not specify penalties for non-registration.⁴

Based on these constitutional and legislative provisions, it appears that Cambodians generally enjoy a high degree of religious freedom, a state of affairs that contrasts with the situation of a number of other fundamental freedoms that are far from being satisfactorily protected in a country that has been ruled in an authoritarian way by the same prime minister, Hun Sen, since 1985. In this respect, the place of Buddhism in the culture and daily life of Cambodians makes this religion a distinct political actor. Although the Buddhist clergy are outside politics, rising tensions in society may, occasionally, cause them to intervene more directly.

For example, in 1998 young monks and novices took to the streets to demonstrate against the sham outcome of the legislative elections of 26th July of that year, which allowed Hun Sen's party to retain power.⁵ During a march for peace, the police fired on monks and killed dozens of them. More recently, in December 2013, hundreds of monks peacefully demonstrated in front of the National Assembly in Phnom Penh carrying a petition that called for an end to human rights abuses in the country. The monks, most of them young, were cheered by a crowd of several thousand people, before dispersing peacefully under the watchful eye of a large police force.⁶

By demonstrating, these monks, active in the "Independent Monks Network for Social Justice", were aware of being at odds with established traditions that require Buddhist religious to remain on the side-lines of state or government affairs. Some important monks did not refrain from expressing reservations about them. In Phnom Penh, the Venerable Khim Sorn, head of the Mohanikay sect, the main branch of Khmer Buddhism, expressed his "support for the principle of marching for rights, but not if it seeks bad goals by aiming to create disorder and confuse people's minds."⁷ The supreme patriarchs of Khmer Buddhism, whose proximity to the ruling party is common knowledge, threatened to defrock the monks taking part in the march. The government, for its part, tried to prevent the monks' peaceful march from reaching Phnom Penh by, for example, forcing pagoda officials to deny marchers access to their monastery at night.

For those in power, who are often accused of acting in an authoritarian manner, the freedom of Buddhist monks to demonstrate should be very clearly limited by what they perceive as an attack on "public order and security". Thus, on 7th December 2014, as the human rights marches multiplied across the country with monks in their ranks, the patriarchs of the two main monastic orders and the Minister of Religion signed a statement banning monks from participating in marches, demonstrations, strikes and revolts in order "to preserve the dignity of Buddhism".⁸

However, the attempt by Cambodian political leaders to keep at bay any criticism coming from Buddhism has proven to be very inconsistent. In 2011, when Cambodia and Thailand found themselves at loggerheads over the Preah Vihear temple, which both countries claim⁹, the Cambodian government appealed to all religious leaders in Cambodia to put pressure on the United Nations and convince the international community to become involved in the crisis.

In short, it seems that the main source of concern about religious freedom is the lack of respect for human rights by a regime that has been dominated for 30 years by the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and its leader Hun Sen.

Incidents

The fate of the Montagnards is an ongoing issue. The Cambodian government has been extremely harsh towards this mostly Christian minority originally from Vietnam's Central Highlands, from which they fled for religious and political reasons. Their exodus is nothing new (it began in 2001 after some groups rose up, and re-emerged in 2006 without really ending). In recent years, Phnom Penh has not hesitated from sending Montagnards back to Vietnam against their will. Very few are able to obtain refugee status from the local UNHCR office. In July 2017, 16 Montagnards were repatriated to Vietnam whilst another 13 left for the Philippines. Of the other 200 seeking asylum in Cambodia, the Refugee Office in Phnom Penh stated that only three would be granted refugee status, as the others are deemed illegal migrants.¹⁰

Cambodia's Muslim Cham minority also seems to have upset the government. Heirs to the Kingdom of Champa, their ancestors began converting to Islam in the 13th century. In the past few years, they have been undergoing a process of re-Islamisation. The hitherto unknown practice of wearing a veil has appeared among Cham women, and in 2014, the Islamic State claimed that Cham were fighting alongside them in Iraq and Syria – claims that were never substantiated by independent sources. Yet, in June 2016, the Cambodian government ordered the closure of Radio Sap Cham, a radio station that had been broadcasting a four-hour daily programme since 2004 devoted to the Cham language, culture, religion and identity.¹¹ It was the country's only Cham-language radio programme.

In September 2016, the National Elections Committee reiterated the right of Muslims to use photographs with heads covered by a skullcap or a veil on their identity papers. Finally, during Ramadan, Prime Minister Hun Sen offered an iftar, a meal to break the fast, to members of the Muslim community, telling them that a policy of discrimination would never be implemented in Cambodia.

Regarding Buddhists, police monitor pagodas where members of the Independent Monks Network for Social Justice are active.¹² In Battambang province, during the June 2017 municipal elections, a monk, Venerable Horn Sopanny, was arrested after appearing on a Facebook page with a revolver in his hand. Dressed in his monk's habit, Horn Sopanny criticised the government, saying that his weapon would be used in the civil war the prime minister predicted in case his party lost in the elections. Arrested on 21st June for illegal possession of firearms, the monk was defended by his relatives, who claimed that the revolver was a plastic toy and that his arrest was politically motivated.¹³

Prospects for freedom of religion

In recent years, Cambodia has become one of the most successful economies in south-east Asia. But anger is rising in the population, especially among young people, tired of corruption and the capture of the country's wealth by an elite close to Hun Sen. As it always does in the run-up to elections – the next parliamentary elections are in July 2018 – the Cambodian regime tries to make a clean sweep of things. On 3rd September 2017, the government announced the arrest of Kem Sokha, the leader of Cambodia's main opposition party, on charges of treason.¹⁴ In this case too, the prime minister, in power for 32 years, presented himself as the bulwark against anarchy and civil war. In June 2016, in front of a gathering of Christians, Hun Sen claimed to be the defender of religious freedom in Cambodia. He said of himself: "When Hun Sen stays, Hun Sen will allow religious practices to be done in every place."¹⁵ Admittedly, in comparison for example with their Vietnamese or Chinese neighbours, Cambodians live under a regime that is much more tolerant and respectful of religious freedom. However, the power exercised today by the Hun Sen regime does not bode well for the country's social and political stability.

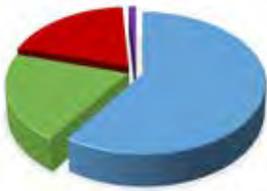
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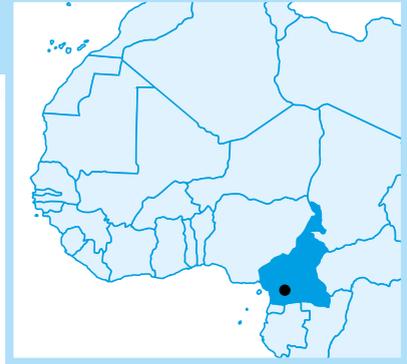
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CAMEROON

RELIGION



- Christians: 59,4%
- Muslims: 20,2%
- Ethnoreligionists: 19,3%
- Others: 1,1%



AREA	POPULATION
475.650km ²	23.924.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution, promulgated in 1972 and most recently amended in 2008, recognises in its preamble that “the human person, without distinction as to race, religion, sex or creed possesses sacred and inalienable rights”. No person, the text continues, “shall be harassed on grounds of his origin, religious, philosophical or political opinions or beliefs, subject to respect for public policy”.¹

The state is defined as secular and its “neutrality and independence” are assured in relation to all religious confessions. Article 18 guarantees the freedom of religion and worship: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

The law requires religious groups to receive government approval to operate, and allows the president to dissolve any existing religious groups. However, hundreds of religious groups operate freely country-wide without official government authorisation. The government has not registered any new religious group since 2010. Registration allows groups to acquire property and brings tax benefits; it also facilitates the work of foreign missionaries who are allowed to apply for longer term visas.²

Muslims in the Far North of the country have always been regarded as holding considerable political and economic power. Christian religious leaders often complain, at least in private, that in practice this has meant that churches often meet lengthy bureaucratic difficulties when they attempt to build their places of worship or other premises for their social activities.³

Unlike state schools, private schools are permitted to offer religious education. However, private religious schools can only operate if they meet the same standards in terms of education and infrastructure as state schools.⁴

The following religious festivals are considered as official public holidays: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, the Ascension, the Assumption, Eid-al-Fitr, Eid-al-Adha, and the Prophet's Birthday.

Incidents

On 31st May 2017, Bishop Jean Marie Benoit of Bafia disappeared from his residence. His body was found by a fisherman in the Sanaga River on 2nd June. Although the first reports suggested that he could have committed suicide, in a statement released on 13th June at the end of a general assembly, the Catholic bishops of Cameroon stated that they believed he had been murdered. The bishops demanded that the murderers "be identified and delivered to justice to be judged according to the law" and added that the government must "assume its duty to protect human life, especially that of the ecclesiastical authorities". They also named four other church officials whose murders, dating back to 1988, have never been solved: Joseph Mbassi, who died in 1988, Antony Fontegh, who died in 1990, Yves Plumey, Archbishop Emeritus of Garoua who died in 1991, and Engelbert Mveng, who died in 1995.

The bishops' statement contradicted the version of events given by the public prosecutor of the appeal court in the Central region where the town of Bafia is located, who said that there was an absence of evidence of violence on the bishop's body and that drowning was the most likely cause of his death.⁵ The Journal du Cameroon reported that on 1st June the bishop's Land Cruiser had been found parked on a bridge in Yaounde, 10 miles upstream, and that a handwritten message in French, which read "I am in the water," was found among papers on the passenger seat. The Camernews agency reported that a medical investigator had noted signs of torture on the bishop's body, as well as indications that he was dead before entering the water. At the time of writing, no culprits have been identified and many circumstances surrounding the case remained unclear. No religious services took place inside the cathedral of Bafia after several signs commonly associated with witchcraft, including fresh blood, were found inside the building.⁶

The English-speaking region of Cameroon, in the west of the country, which has been marred by violent protests since 2016, was the scene of several incidents which religious leaders denounced as attacks on the freedom of religion. On 16th October 2017, the Catholic bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Bamenda denounced the "barbaric and irresponsible use of firearms by the security forces against the unarmed civilian population". The bishops said that they were particularly alarmed by the fact that a number of worshippers, who were on their way to Sunday Mass, were "chased away from their homes, some were arrested, and some others – including defenceless adolescents and elderly persons – were shot dead, particularly using helicopter gunships".⁷

The Far North region of Cameroon, which has a mixed population of Muslims and Christians, continued to be beset by numerous attacks by the Boko Haram terrorist group, which since 2014 has extended its deadly campaign of mass violence from Nigeria to Cameroon. It is reported Boko Haram's armed attacks scaled down during 2017 and 2018.

This can be attributed to the military weakening of Daesh in the Middle East because Boko Haram is the “affiliate” of Daesh in Cameroon. Some attempts by Muslim leaders to call for inter-faith dialogue and religious tolerance were undertaken in May 2017, by the Council of Imams and Religious Dignitaries of Cameroon (CIDIMUC).

In the Boko Haram-affected areas there is a long-standing tradition of inter-religious cooperation between Christians and Muslims, with many remarkable initiatives of peaceful co-existence, particularly the ones led by the Catholic diocese of Maroua-Mokolo, under bishop Mgr Bruno Ateba Edo (since 2014). A number of local media sources reported that, in some cases, Christians secured mosques during prayer sessions while Muslims reciprocated and guarded churches on Sundays, as an early warning method to minimise the risk of surprise attacks.

Several imams in the north of Cameroon continued to argue that Boko Haram's violent campaign is not about religion, but about political extremism and terrorism. Some of them said that the greatest issue was not inter-religious tensions, but an intra-religious conflict inside Islam, which pits Wahabbism against more moderate versions of Islam which have traditionally prevailed in the country. At the same time, it must be noted that Boko Haram's violence has adversely changed the perception of many ordinary Christians in Cameroon, who associate Boko Haram with Islam; this results in an increased stigmatisation of some Muslims.

The inter-faith organization ACADIR (Association Camerounaise de Dialogue Interreligieuse), founded in 2006 and which operates at national level, has played a commendable role in creating smooth relations between Catholics, Protestants and Muslims. In 2017, the authorities asked ACADIR to take responsibility for developing reintegration programmes for ex-combatants from Boko Haram.

In Maroua in 2015, Christian and Muslim leaders created a Maison de la Rencontre. Set in the Dongo neighbourhood of Maroua, it is run by a committee made up of three Muslims, three Catholics, two Protestants and an Orthodox. The centre promotes Islamo-Christian dialogue and organizes regular workshops for youth, women, local leaders, and others.⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

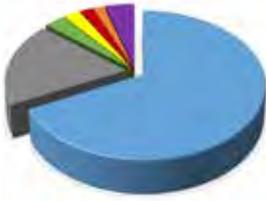
During the last few years, the violence caused by Boko Haram in the Far North of Cameroon has continued, although efforts by the military to engage in counter-terrorism operations coupled with the internal weakness of Daesh are factors which explain the scaling down in violent attacks. While there are commendable efforts to smooth inter-faith relations between Christians and Muslims, the nature of the conflict has attracted some degree of hostility and negative perceptions towards Muslims. In addition to this trend, which continued during the reporting period, the attacks to worshippers in the newly emerging conflict in the Western Anglophone regions of Cameroon, as well as the mysterious death of the bishop of Bafia provide serious reasons for concern. Should these focuses of conflict

continue without due attention from the relevant authorities during the next few years, there are reasons to believe that the situation of religious freedom could deteriorate.

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RELIGION



- Christians: 67,6%
- Agnostics: 18,6%
- Muslims: 3,1%
- Atheists: 2,6%
- Chinese Folk Religionists: 1,9%
- Buddhists: 1,7%
- Others: 4,5%



AREA	POPULATION
9.984.670km ²	36.286.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution and laws of Canada guarantee freedom of conscience and religion, as well as thought, belief, opinion and expression,¹ subject to “reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society”.² Canadians have the right to “equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination” based on religion.³

Federal and provincial laws prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion, permit individuals to sue for violations of religious freedom, and provide remedies for complaints.⁴

Religious groups are not required to register with the government. However, to receive tax-exempt status religious groups must register as non-profit organisations with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). Charitable status grants the clergy access to a number of federal benefits, such as tax deductions for resident clergy and faster immigration procedures.⁵

The constitution guarantees the right of Protestant and Catholic minorities to publicly funded denominational schools. Constitutional amendments repealed this guarantee in Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador and replaced them with a secular public education system. Constitutionally protected public funding for Catholic schools remains in place in Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. Federal law protects publicly funded Catholic and Protestant minority education in the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut.⁶ Six of the 10 provinces provide at least partial funding to some religious schools.⁷ Home-schooling is legal across Canada and financial support is provided to parents in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia.⁸

In November 2016, an Ontario court rejected a father’s complaint that his religious freedom was violated when the school board failed to provide advance notice of the school’s sexual education curriculum. He argued that without notice, he lacked the information to determine whether the content conflicted with his Christian views. The judge dismissed the complaint, saying inclusion and equality come before “individual religious accommodations in public education”.⁹

In late November 2017 the Supreme Court heard the case of Trinity Western University’s (TWU) challenge of the refusal of law societies to accredit graduates from its law pro-

gramme because of its Community Covenant which states that sexual intimacy must be confined to the traditional definition of marriage. The licensing bodies for attorneys of British Columbia, Ontario, and Nova Scotia claimed that the covenant was discriminatory to the LGBT+ community. The Supreme Court heard two appeals together: one from the Law Society of British Columbia and one from TWU.¹⁰ Lawyers for TWU argued that a ruling against the university “could ultimately impact all faith-based schools, charities, and organizations.”¹¹ A decision was expected in the late spring or summer of 2018.

In March 2018, a court rejected a challenge to the provisions proscribing polygamy in the Criminal Code¹² on religious freedom grounds by two members of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who had been found guilty of polygamy in British Columbia in July 2017.¹³

Quebec passed a law in October 2017 banning face coverings for those giving or receiving public services “so as to ensure quality communication between persons and allow their identity to be verified, and for security purposes”.¹⁴ The law also set forth circumstances under which “accommodations on religious grounds” may be granted, including that “the request is serious”; “is consistent . . . with religious neutrality”, and “reasonable in that it does not impose undue hardship”.¹⁵

Several groups challenged the law after it passed and in December 2017, a Quebec judge stayed the face-covering ban until the province established clear guidelines for religious accommodation.¹⁶

In June 2016, a coalition of groups representing more than 4,700 Christian doctors filed a request for judicial review of Ontario’s requirement that they refer patients to physicians willing to provide assisted death, arguing the referrals make them complicit in the act and violated constitutional guarantees of freedom of conscience and religion. The challenge followed enactment of a federal law legalising assisted death but with a conscientious objection provision. Ontario was the only province to require a referral to another physician rather than to a registry.¹⁷

On 31st January 2018 the court agreed the Ontario requirement infringed “the rights of religious freedom” of the physicians, but said it was justified because of the importance of providing access to the service. The president of one of physicians’ organisations said: “This decision... raises alarm bells to all health care workers and Ontario residents that their freedom of religion and conscience could also be jeopardised.”¹⁸

A coalition of Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders met with government officials in March 2018 to object to the Canada Summer Jobs funding application procedure which requires “both the job and the organisation’s core mandate respect individual human rights in Canada, including the values underlying the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms... [which includes] reproductive rights [i.e. abortion]”.¹⁹ They wrote in a letter of January 2018: “The promise of a free and democratic society is that there be no religious or ideological test or conditions to receiving government benefit or protection”.²⁰ A constitutional challenge in the Federal Court was scheduled for June 2018.

Incidents

Official hate crime figures recorded by police in 2016 (the most recent available at time of writing) included 221 crimes determined to be motivated by anti-Semitism. Civil society organisations reported to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) 171 anti-Semitic incidents, with 160 attacks against property, one threat, and 10 violent attacks against people.²²

The B'nai B'rith Canada League for Human Rights received 1,728 reports of anti-Semitic incidents in 2016, marking a 26 percent increase from the previous year and the highest number of incidents since B'nai B'rith began its survey.²³

Incidents just in Ontario in 2016 included: a man being arrested for threatening the Jewish community in June; swastikas painted on a billboard in July; and in November a swastika daubed on a rabbi's front door.²⁴

In November 2016, a Jewish school, a synagogue, and a rabbi's home in Ottawa were vandalised with anti-Semitic graffiti within the space of a week. A mosque and church were also targeted.²⁵

Several pieces of anti-Semitic graffiti, including the phrase "Hitler was right", were daubed on a highway overpass in Toronto. These were reported in the summer and early autumn of 2017.²⁶

Synagogues in Toronto, Edmonton, Montreal, Hamilton, and Calgary all received hate mail in December 2017. Police hate crimes units in these cities coordinated efforts to investigate.²⁷

In March 2018 a Montreal petrol station owner apologised to a Jewish customer after an employee insulted the man with anti-Semitic language. The employee was fired.²⁸

Official hate crime figures recorded by police in 2016 included 139 anti-Muslim crimes: the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) submitted data to the OSCE about 43 anti-Muslim incidents.²⁹

The NCCM reports that a number of incidents occurred during 2016: a pig's head was left at a mosque in Quebec City in June; a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf was insulted, spat at and had her headscarf pulled at while shopping in Ontario in June; an air rifle was used to fire through an Ontario mosque window while children were studying inside in July; a Vancouver mosque was targeted in attempted arson in September; in October, the glass door to an Islamic centre in South Calgary was broken and a burnt Qur'an and a hate letter were left at the scene; and in November, the head of a Muslim organisation, based in Quebec, received death threats.³⁰

On 29th January 2017, Alexandre Bissonnette, a 27-year-old university student,³¹ opened fire inside the Quebec Islamic Cultural Centre during evening prayers. Six men were killed and five were critically wounded. Bissonnette entered a guilty plea to six counts of first-degree murder and six of attempted murder on 28th March 2018.³²

A man was arrested in March 2017 after a letter containing a bomb threat targeting Muslim students at Concordia University was sent to Montreal media outlets.³³

The same Quebec Islamic Cultural Centre, where six people were shot in January 2017, received a package containing a defaced Qur'an and a note saying the Muslim community should use a hog farm for a cemetery in July 2017.³⁴ In August, the car of the centre's president was set on fire and the centre's doors were smeared with excrement.³⁵

In December 2017 a Colombian man, mistaken for being Muslim, was beaten with a baseball bat and insulted by a man yelling "ISIS" (e.g. Islamic State or Daesh) and "terrorist".³⁶

The sign outside an Islamic centre, which was under construction, was defaced with derogatory ISIS graffiti in February 2018.³⁷

Official hate crime figures recorded by police in 2016 (the most recent available at time of writing) included 27 crimes motivated by bias against Christians.³⁸

A man was charged with arson and mischief after throwing a "small firebomb" through the window of a church in Toronto on Easter morning 2017.³⁹

Two churches in Ontario were vandalised with graffiti in August 2017, one with a racist message and the second with the words "Islamic State".⁴⁰

In November 2017, a church in British Columbia was defaced with the words "Kill All Christians", less than a week after 26 people were killed in a Baptist church in Texas. It was the second incident of vandalism in a week.⁴¹ A British Columbia church was vandalised with fake blood in November 2017 after being the target of previous vandalism in August.⁴²

A small New Brunswick church was attacked by vandals who broke windows, damaged furniture, stepped on communion bread, and smashed the piano in late November 2017.⁴³

On Easter 2018 vandalism with vulgar anti-Christian messages was discovered painted on two Catholic churches in Halifax.⁴⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

New or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period under review may have a negative impact on both majority and minority religions over the next two years. There appears to be an increased risk of societal intolerance against minority religions, some of which may be a backlash to global terrorism or geopolitical conflicts attributed to religious groups, as well as anti-immigration sentiments in Canada.

Endnotes

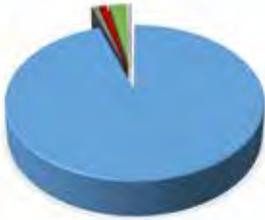
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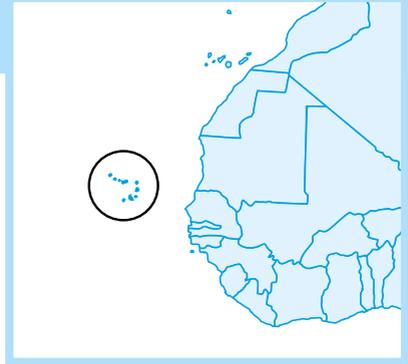
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CAPE VERDE

RELIGION



- Christians: 94,9%
- Muslims: 2,8%
- Ethnoreligionists: 1,1%
- Agnostics: 1%
- Others: 0,2%



AREA
4.033km²

POPULATION¹
527.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

A former Portuguese colony, Cape Verde has the highest percentage of Catholics among African countries.¹ Protestants and Pentecostal groups continue to increase their membership.² Due to mass emigration in the second half of the twentieth century, the number of Cape Verdeans living abroad is almost twice that of those still living in Cape Verde.³

Freedom of religion and the right to religious self-expression are enshrined in the constitution and laws of Cape Verde.⁴ There is no state religion;⁵ the constitution ensures the separation of Church and state. By law, every citizen is free to choose or change religion, and a recent law, ratified on 16th May 2014, further codifies the right to worship freely and also to provide religious instruction to children.

An agreement signed by Cape Verde and the Holy See in 2013 recognises the independent legal status of the Catholic Church as well as its right freely to carry out missionary activity. It also protects Catholic places of worship and grants church marriages the same status as civil marriages.⁶ However, the special relationship between the state and the Catholic Church has not met with universal approval.⁷

All religious and secular organisations are required to register with the Ministry of Justice and are not permitted to support violence, illegality, racism or dictatorship.⁸ There are no sanctions in place for organisations failing to register, but there are benefits for those that do. As a matter of principle, no religion enjoys special rights. The Catholic Church wields considerable influence, however, as it is by far the largest religious community in the country.

Incidents

Christianity is firmly rooted in the culture of Cape Verde. Relations between the different religions are fundamentally free of tensions. A source of great joy for many Catholics was the elevation of Bishop Arlindo Gomes Furtado to the position of Cardinal in early 2015.⁹ After his appointment as Bishop of Mindelo in 2004, he became Bishop of Santiago in 2009, the country's main island where the capital Praia is located.

Prospects for freedom of religion

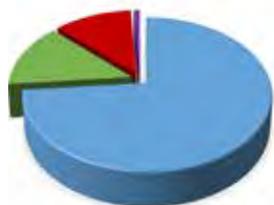
There were no significant changes in religious freedom or events of special interest during the current reporting period.¹⁰ There is no reason to believe that this situation will fundamentally change. Nevertheless, the entire region of West Africa is experiencing major change, and the influence of Islamic hyper-extremism cannot be ruled out.

Endnotes

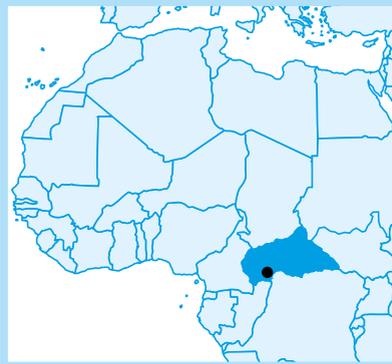
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CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

RELIGION



- Christians: 73,5%
- Muslims: 13,8%
- Ethnoreligionists: 11,8%
- Others: 0,9%



AREA	POPULATION
622.984km ²	4.692.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Central African Republic's (CAR's) new constitution was approved by a referendum on 13th December 2015 and promulgated on 30th March 2016. It marks the end of the political transition that followed the crisis caused by the takeover by Seleka rebels in March 2013 and replaces the transitional charter put in place in July 2013.

The preamble of the new constitution recognises the religious and cultural diversity of the Central African people. Article 8 guarantees "freedom of conscience, of assembly, [and] of the free exercise of beliefs" and forbids "all forms of religious fundamentalism and intolerance". Article 18 proclaims the secular character of the state.¹

The Government of the CAR signed a framework agreement, equivalent to a concordat, with the Holy See, on 6th September 2016.

Religious groups, except for followers of traditional religions, are required to register with the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security. Registration can be refused if it is deemed that the group presents a threat to public morals and/or social peace. The procedure is free and confers official recognition and certain benefits, including tax benefits, but there are no penalties for groups that fail to register.²

Residency permits for expatriate personnel working with religious organisations can be easily renewed.³

New religious groups, particularly Pentecostal or "born-again" Churches have been coming to CAR during the last few years, and have held religious services without difficulties. In some cases, official government buildings, like the Foreign Ministry in Bangui, are availed to them for public religious ceremonies.⁴

Religious education is not compulsory but is available in most schools. The Catholic Church has a network of schools in all nine of the country's dioceses, coordinated by the Écoles Catholiques Associées en Centrafrique (ÉCAC), based on a memorandum of understanding signed with the Education Ministry. Foreigners working for ÉCAC are granted a free residency permit. The state-run University of Bangui has a Catholic chaplaincy next to its campus, run by the Jesuits, with a wide range of pastoral and cultural activities.

The main Christian festivities – Good Friday, Easter, the Ascension, the Assumption of Our Lady, All Saints and Christmas – are public holidays. Since 2017, following a national reconciliation conference, the main Muslim festivities – Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Kebir – have also been public holidays.

Incidents

After a few months of peace in early 2016, the country plunged back into the sectarian strife that had begun in 2012.⁵ On 7th January 2018, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, put the number of internally displaced persons at 630,000, with another 545,000 refugees in neighbouring countries. These are the highest figures since the beginning of the crisis.⁶

There have been many acts of discrimination and violent attacks, including retaliatory killings between communities. While in Bangui the violence can be controlled relatively quickly, the same cannot be said outside the capital where at least 14 militias operate. Whether calm is restored depends on the speed of intervention of the UN mission (MINUSCA)⁷ and the level of mediation by the Catholic Church.

Members of the Muslim community reported continued discrimination, including in government. Islamic organisations were disappointed with the first government of President Faustin-Archange Touadera, in 2016, which had only four Muslim members, and with the Offices of the President and the Prime Minister, which had none. On 12th September 2017, a cabinet reshuffle added four more Muslims. Three Muslims became senior presidential advisers. Four days later the President appointed new prefects in the country's 16 prefectures, but none of them were Muslims.

According to many witnesses, Muslim truck drivers were systematically singled out at checkpoints, harassed and forced to pay money to the police, gendarmerie, and soldiers.⁸

Some incidents have led to retaliation in the capital. On 19th June 2016, 26 Muslims travelling in a MINUSCA-escorted convoy were stopped and taken for questioning to the outskirts of Bangui. An armed group based in PK5, Bangui's main Muslim neighbourhood, retaliated by abducting six policemen. The next day, the same armed militia tried to capture the local police station and fired on the Rwandan contingent protecting it. Among the assailants, eight people were reported dead and 13 wounded. As tensions rose in Bangui, a Muslim man in a mainly Christian quarter near PK5 was reportedly abducted and killed. The abducted policemen were released after a week in captivity.⁹

On 4th October 2016, a gunman thought to belong to a Muslim armed group fired on a vehicle driven by Major Marcel Mombeka, wounding his 14-year-old son. Soon after, a group of soldiers killed a Muslim moto-taxi driver. Suspected soldiers also killed three Fulani Muslim herdsman, near Bangui's slaughter house. At 4.40pm clashes were reported between opposing groups near the Fatima Church. In total, 11 people were killed and MINUSCA reported 22 wounded in the city's hospitals.

The Church has been called in to stop sectarian violence. Following the violence on 4th October 2016, Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga, the Archbishop of Bangui, led a march on 12th October from the Third District to PK5 and back. He met with members of armed groups, including Abdoul Danda, who handed over to him a man held hostage for two weeks.

In other cases, threats have displaced whole communities. On 20th January 2017, about 20 armed men from Big Man's group partially burnt down a temporary shelter used as a place of worship near the Baptist church in Mbaya Dombia (Third District). After the Baptists rebuilt the shelter, the same militias attacked it again on 24th January, leaving a note saying that they would not allow any church to be rebuilt until mosques were rebuilt. As a result, the Baptist pastors moved their church to Boeing, a neighbouring Christian quarter.¹⁰

Police crackdowns often cause retaliation between religious groups, with Christians often the victims. On 7th February 2017, police shot dead Big Man and his deputy in PK5. Later in the evening, his militia stabbed to death an Evangelical pastor, Rev Jean Paul Sankagui, a much-respected figure in PK5 who had gone to his church in Ramandji to be with some of his parishioners who had found refuge there.

At the same time, some remarkable initiatives have been undertaken to aid relations between Christian and Muslim communities. After local leaders from PK5 and Boeing signed a non-aggression pact on 11th February 2016, Muslims were able to use their cemetery in Boeing, which is located five kilometres from PK5. Previously they had been unable to travel to the cemetery because of hostility from the area's mostly Christian residents.

Since mid-2016, efforts have been made to rehabilitate at least eight mosques located in mainly Christian areas, which brings a semblance of normality and free movement to many Bangui districts. All mosques outside PK5 had been destroyed by anti-Balaka¹¹ militias in early 2014.¹²

Interfaith cooperation has also involved civilians. Bangui's Fifth District was once home to 20,000 Muslims¹³ forced out by anti-balaka militias at the beginning of 2014. Since January 2017, a Comité de Retour of Christian residents tried to sensitise their neighbours with MINUSCA support. By the end of the year, they had managed to get 80 Muslim families to return. As part of that reconciliation effort, the district's main mosque, located in Mali Maka neighbourhood, was reopened at the feast marking the end of Ramadan, on 25th June 2017.

Outside of Bangui, things are different. During 2016-2017 and the first months of 2018, most of the country saw heavy violence which involved 14 armed groups (including animist groups) engaged in sectarian fighting.

In the south-eastern town of Bangassou, which had been militia-free since the end of 2013 and where Christians and Muslims co-existed well, things changed drastically on 13th May 2017 when self-styled self-defence militias made up of young men from nearby villages attacked the town, targeting its Muslim population. More than 70 people were

killed on that day, and more than 2,000 Muslims took refuge in the mosque, which was surrounded by militiamen. The intervention of the Catholic bishop, Monsignor Juan José Aguirre, prevented a greater massacre. The next day, MINUSCA forces took the Muslims to diocesan headquarters. However, they have not been able to leave because of harassment from the self-defence militia¹⁴.

Some of the young Muslims displaced in Bangassou have become increasingly radicalised, and have managed to obtain firearms. Given the tensions, they have often targeted the very institution that gave them protection. On various occasions they have broken into and looted the diocesan offices and residences. On 5th January 2018, Father Alain Bissialo, who chairs of the local peace and reconciliation committee, was attacked and seriously injured in the parish house in the Tokoyo neighbourhood. On 9th April 2018, after one week of negotiations mediated by Cardinal Nzapalainga and Imam Kobine Layama, the armed groups present in Bangassou signed a peace accord which guaranteed the free movement of people, including the displaced Muslims living at the diocesan compound.¹⁵ However, violence flared up again in February and March 2018, and one of the priests had to leave Bangassou for good. Ever since Bangassou was attacked, sectarian conflicts have spread rapidly to other parts of eastern CAR like Bakouma, Nzako, Gambo, Bema, Pombolo, Rafai, Mboki and Zemio.

Foreign militias have also come into the picture as they seek to grab land within CAR. In Zemio, militias reportedly associated with the Janjaweed from Sudan, launched an attack on 2nd September 2017. A retired priest, Father Louis Tongagnessi, who taught at a college, was murdered trying to find a safe shelter.¹⁶ The day before, the two diocesan priests in charge of the local Catholic parish, Father Jean-Alain Zimbi and Father Desiré Blaise Kpangou, and the 15,000 people who had sheltered in their church for weeks, crossed the nearby Mbomou River into the Democratic Republic of Congo. As soon as they left, the church compound was assaulted and looted by armed men. There were also many reports of anti-balaka militias attacking and burning villages with Muslims.

Bria, also in the east, saw heavy fighting between an ex-Seleka¹⁷ militia and anti-balaka. On 4th September 2017, a parish priest, Father Ephrem Pounaba, narrowly escaped an assassination attempt by the ex-Seleka forces. Around the same time, a Polish fidei donum priest working in Ngaoundaye (Diocese of Bouar, northwestern CAR) was abducted by another ex-Seleka group.¹⁸

In conflict zones, the Catholic Church has pursued interreligious dialogue, often finding herself persecuted by those involved. For example, two Catholic priests in Kembé set up a forum (Union des Confessions Religieuses de Kembé pour la Paix) between Catholics, Protestants and Muslims.¹⁹

In the absence of interfaith dialogue, there were thefts, abductions and large scale material destruction. "On Friday 22nd September 2017, towards 4:00 pm, the anti-balaka came to steal goats in the village of Caf-Bangui, leaving 40 people dead. The next day, the ex-Seleka received reinforcements and attacked the village of Mbingo, 10 kilometres from Kembé. The Catholic and Evangelical churches in Kembé hosted many displaced

persons from Caf-Bangui, but the ex-Seleka ordered them to vacate the churches. Later, on 10th October, the whole of Kembé came under heavy gunfire after 1,800 fighters from Bangassou and Mingala tried to encircle the town. The fighting, which started at 4:00 am and lasted until midday, left 150 people killed.²⁰ The priests deplored the fact that many Catholic youth and several parish counsellors and catechists joined the anti-balaka and turned against them. In the end, they left Kembé to save their lives.

During the 10th October attack in Kembé, the anti-balaka attacked the mosque, where reportedly 44 people, mostly Muslims but also some Christians, had taken refuge. At least 26 were killed.²¹ A Protestant pastor, Jean-Fernand Dangouin, was compelled to leave Kembé during heavy clashes between UPC and self-defence militiamen between 5 and 10 January 2018.²²

In Ouaka Prefecture, Father Joseph Désiré Angbabat, was seriously wounded on 21st March 2018 during a UPC attack against the town of Séko. He was shot in Saint Charles Lwanga Parish Church where he had given shelter to many civilians. He was evacuated but succumbed to his wounds two days later.²³

On 3rd April 2018, MINUSCA peacekeepers discovered the bodies of 21 civilians (including four children) near a church in Tagbara, 60 kilometres north-east of Bambari, also in Ouaka Prefecture. Initial findings suggest self-defence militias were the authors of the massacre. The next day, gruesome pictures of the incident were posted in Facebook, with comments indicating the victims were Muslims targeted because of their religion. Some were found decapitated; one victim, a pregnant woman, had her womb slit open.²⁴

Despite progress in Bangui towards religious freedom and better interfaith relationships, a serious incident took place on 1st May 2018. Militiamen, presumed to be Muslim, from a PK5-based self-defence group led by ringleader Amineri Matar aka "Force" stormed Notre-Dame de Fatima Church during a Mass. On 2nd May, the CAR Red Cross reported that 27 people were killed and 170 wounded in the incident.²⁵

One of the people killed in the Fatima church was Father Albert Toungoumale-Baba, a much-respected diocesan priest who had played an outstanding role for years in promoting reconciliation between Muslims and Christians in Bangui. Following the massacre, an angry crowd of over 1,000 people carried his body through the streets up to the Presidential Palace, where they were dispersed by police who fired in the air. Some of the protesters came to the Lakouanga neighbourhood, home to an important Muslim community, and partially destroyed the mosque. Two Muslim men were also burnt alive.²⁶

Prospects for freedom of religion

During the reporting period, the state of religious freedom continued to deteriorate in the Central African Republic. Although prominent religious leaders have consistently denied that the conflict had a religious character, numerous acts of violence were committed in which individuals and/or communities were targeted because of their religion. Since

various armed groups operate in about 80 percent of the country, and as the conflict is escalating in many areas, the situation of religious freedom is likely to get worse.

Endnotes

- 1 See also Central African Republic's Constitution of 2004 with Amendments through 2010, [constituteproject.org, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Central_African_Republic_2010.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Central_African_Republic_2010.pdf?lang=en), (accessed 5th June 2018).
- 2 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Central African Republic', International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016/>, (accessed 5th June 2018).
- 3 Conversation, on 6 January 2018, with an expatriate Catholic priest who has worked in CAR since 2011.
- 4 Personal observation of the author of this report, who has lived regularly in CAR since mid-2012.
- 5 Detailed accounts of most incidents of violence in CAR during the reporting period can be found in the 2016 and 2017 reports of the UN Panel of Experts, which every year publishes a midterm report and a final report. They are available at Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic, Security Council Subsidiary Organs, <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/2127/panel-of-experts/reports>, (accessed 5th June 2018).
- 6 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Central African Republic (CAR), <http://www.unocha.org/car>, (accessed 5th June 2018).
- 7 The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic is better known by its French acronym MINUSCA, which is the Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en Centrafrique.
- 8 Three meetings, held during 2017, with Ali Ousmane, chairman of Coordination of Muslim Organisations of Central Africa (Coordination des Organisations Musulmans de Centrafrique, COMUC).
- 9 This incident and the ones which are reported in Bangui were directly documented by the author, who worked in Bangui during 2016, most of 2017 and the first months of 2018.
- 10 The author of this report visited the burnt-out site and talked to the Baptist pastors the days after the attacks.
- 11 The anti-balaka are militias erroneously labelled Christian, initially created to protect villages. See "Repair of a vehicle for the diocese of Bambari, following the rebel attacks", Aid to the Church in Need Canada, 13th March 2015, <https://acn-canada.org/tag/anti-balaka-en/>, (accessed 6th June 2018).
- 12 The Imam of the mosque of Petevo, Abdoulaye Washelege, expressed his gratitude towards Cardinal Nzapalainga, who supported them with 400,000CFA and two other Christian churches from Petevo who also gave some donations for the reconstruction of the mosque. Conversation with the author on 23rd June 2017.
- 13 Interview with the Mayor of Bangui's 5th district, Alain Yemo, in April 2017.
- 14 Conversations with the Bishop of Bangassou, Juan José Aguirre, and his auxiliary bishop Jesús Ruiz, on 7th January 2018, in Bangui.
- 15 Judicael Yongo, "Centrafrique : Les groupes armés signent un accord de paix à Bangassou pour faciliter la libre circulation des personnes et des biens", Réseau des Journalistes pour les Droits l'Homme, 11th April 2018, <http://rjdh.org/centrafrique-les-groupes-armes-signent-un-accord-de-paix-a-bangassou-pour-faciliter-la-libre-circulation-des-personnes-et-des-biens/>, (accessed 5th June 2018).
- 16 Ngala Killian Chimtom, "Cardinal laments deadly year for Church in Central African Republic", Crux, 16th January 2018, <https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2018/01/16/cardinal-laments-deadly-year-church-central-african-republic/>, (accessed 6th June 2018).
- 17 This particular ex-Seleka group are known as the Popular Front for the Renaissance of Central Africa (Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique).
- 18 This ex-Seleka group is called Movement for Peace in Central Africa (Mouvance pour la Paix en Centrafrique, MPC).

- 19 The author of this report had access to the journal written by the two priests between September and October 2017, which they sent to their bishop and was circulated among many priests.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 UN group of experts on the CAR, December 2017.
- 22 “Centrafrique : Le récit du drame de la Basse-Kotto avec le poignant témoignage du Pasteur Jean Dangouin”, Bangui.com, 28th February 2018, <http://news.abangui.com/h/61985.html> (accessed 5th June 2018).
- 23 Official statement, dated 23rd March 2018, by Bishop Richard Appora, of the diocese of Bambari.
- 24 Central African Muslim Collective (Collectif des Musulmans Centrafricains-CMC, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/284717978724883/about/>, (accessed 5th June 2018).
- 25 The account of this incident is based on conversations of the author on 1st May 2018 with some of his personal contacts from Bangui, including clergy from Notre Dame de Fatima.
- 26 “RCA: l’église Notre-Dame de Fatima attaquée, flambée de violences à Bangui”, RFI Afrique, 2nd May 2018, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20180501-rca-eglise-notre-dame-fatima-bangui-attaquee>, (accessed 5th June 2018).

CHAD

RELIGION



- Muslims: 56,7%
- Christians: 35,2%
- Ethnoreligionists: 7,1%
- Others: 1%



AREA	POPULATION
1.284.000km ²	14.497.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

According to the constitution of 14th April 1996 (amended in 2005),¹ which is based on the French model, Chad is a presidential republic with a multi-party system, but it has highly autocratic traits.² The country's constitution was drafted by the Conférence Nationale Souveraine (CNS, Sovereign National Conference) during a three-year transitional period. On 31st January 1996, it was ratified in a referendum with 61.5 percent of the vote. However, the work which the CNS did on the constitution was made more difficult by the fact that first it had to come to terms with a past marked by violent conflicts.

Later, in the early 2000s, the ruling party, the Mouvement Patriotique du Salut (MPS, Patriotic Salvation Movement), sought to amend the constitution by removing the two-term limit on presidential office. The head of the MPS, Idriss Déby, who is also the current president of the country, has been in power without interruption since 1990. In the most recent presidential election in 2016, he was re-elected with nearly 60 percent of the votes.³ Practically all opposition parties signed a joint declaration against him.

The constitutional amendment was adopted by the country's parliament in May 2004 and ratified by referendum on 6th June 2005. Allegations of electoral fraud were repeatedly made throughout the referendum process and have continued even long afterwards.

The constitutional amendment took away all hope among Chadians and the opposition that the regime might change. There have been repeated rebel attacks and coup attempts against the government since, even from within its own ranks. To date, however, Déby, who considers himself the sole guarantor of stability and development, has been able to repel them. He intends to continue to rule Chad, together with his party, indefinitely. In 2016, Déby was standing for re-election once again after 25 years in office. In contrast to the 2011 elections, however, a large majority in the opposition did not boycott the elections.

Article one of Chad's constitution establishes the principle of secularity and the separation of state and religion.⁴ Article five prohibits any propaganda that seeks to impede "national unity or the secularity of the State", and this includes propaganda "of ... religious character". In article 14, the state guarantees all citizens "equality before the law without distinction of origin, of race, of sex, of religion, of political opinion or of social position".⁵

Article 27 mentions freedom of religion as one of the freedoms that may be restricted only in the interest of the freedoms and rights of others, or in the interest of public order and morals. Article 51 makes military service compulsory while article 54 states: "One may neither invoke religious beliefs or philosophical opinions to avoid an obligation dictated by the national interest." The effect is that objections to military service for reasons of conscience are not allowed.⁶

In keeping with the principle of a secular state, religious education is prohibited in public schools. Religious groups may, however, operate schools of their own. The wearing of burkas (or religious head coverings that cover the entire face) is prohibited.⁷

Incidents

Religious groups in Chad typically enjoy good relationships, particularly in the south of the country. Delegations of Muslims and Christians regularly attend one another's religious celebrations and feast days.⁸

However, there are two social developments in particular which have led repeatedly to tensions, violence, or bloodshed. As a consequence of these two trends, and following serious attacks by Islamist groups in previous years, there has been no improvement in the situation of religious freedom in Chad during the period under review.⁹ First, Islamist groups exist within Chad's Muslim population. Second, jihadist fighters have come from abroad seeking to destabilise Chad.¹⁰

Up to 10 percent of Muslims are thought to have Islamist tendencies, adhering to Salafism or Wahhabism, a strict interpretation of the Qur'an originating in Saudi Arabia.¹¹ These hard-line Muslims repeatedly come in conflict with moderate Muslims.¹² The absence of Salafists from the government-instituted High Council for Islamic Affairs (HCIA) is viewed as problematic within the Islamic community.¹³

The Regional Forum on Interfaith Dialogue, which is composed of representatives of the Islamic community, Protestant churches and the Catholic Church, convenes several times a year in order to promote religious tolerance and combat prejudices towards people of other faiths.¹⁴

There have been repeated armed clashes involving the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram, which operates from Nigeria in the region around Lake Chad. This region is strategically located between four countries: Chad, Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon. Here, Boko Haram is easily able to retreat and hide.¹⁵ Its fighters operate in the border area but live on islands on the Nigerian side. They can penetrate neighbouring countries and invade villages before retreating back to the islands.¹⁶ People from Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad have been drawn to the same region, fleeing either poverty or Boko Haram. Some 2.3 million displaced persons are said to live there now.¹⁷

Chad and three other African countries – Niger, Nigeria, and Cameroon – are militarily engaged against Boko Haram, fielding a total force of 9,000 soldiers.¹⁸ The fighting often claims lives.¹⁹ A Chadian army statement reported an operation by its troops against the

terrorist group on five Nigerian islands in Lake Chad. Encounters with Boko Haram in late June 2017 resulted in the deaths of eight Chadian soldiers and 162 Boko Haram fighters. On 23rd March 2018, 20 Boko Haram fighters were killed in clashes with Chadian soldiers.²⁰ According to the Chadian army, the fighting took place on an island in Lake Chad. One Chadian soldier was killed, and five others wounded.

Father Franco Martellozzo, a Jesuit priest who has lived in Chad for more than 50 years, states that, even though Boko Haram has not gained a foothold in the country, militant extremism is a source of concern.²¹ The cross-border spread of Islamist terror poses a particular threat to Christians living in the region. In the current crisis, the missionary points out, the Catholic community remains hopeful and provides human, spiritual and material assistance “to meet the needs of the people, particularly the weakest and the needy.”²²

Prospects for freedom of religion

The threat of Islamist jihadism is not the only factor that makes it difficult for people in Chad to exercise their right to religious freedom without restrictions. Their situation is compounded by extreme poverty. Indeed, according to Chad’s Catholic Bishops, the country is in real economic and social difficulty.²³

At a political level, the Bishops complain that there is a “lack of dialogue” among the government, the opposition, the institutions and the civilian population which poses “a serious threat to democracy”. At an economic level, as an oil-producing nation, Chad relies on exports for revenue. The Catholic bishops note that this has meant that “the country has lost its agricultural and pastoral vocation.”²⁴

Mismanagement of oil revenues and the “brutal fall in international oil prices” have shown, “as expected, the fragility of [the] economy.” Lack of interest in the agricultural sector, combined with increasing desertification, have led to many “bloody conflicts between shepherds and farmers, causing human and material losses.”²⁵

In early 2018 the country’s main trade unions called for an indefinite general strike against government austerity and cuts in civil servants’ salaries made following lower oil revenues.²⁶ Trade unions denounced not just the wage cuts but the prohibition and repression of peaceful initiatives by the authorities, such as the use of tear gas when police broke up student protests in the Chadian capital city, N’Djamena. Some 100 protesters were arrested in that incident.²⁷

Against a backdrop of strong social and political tension, the Catholic Church in Chad was calling on the population and the authorities to “contribute to the common good, and to overcome the crisis, without succumbing to the temptation of violence or despair,” said Father Martellozzo.²⁸

Compounding the difficulty is the still-unresolved problem of refugees in eastern Chad, which borders on the crisis-torn region of Darfur, in Sudan.²⁹ According to various reports, more than 400,000 vulnerable refugees found shelter in 14 camps in this part of the

Sahel, ranked among the largest in Africa, and were reliant on humanitarian assistance. The camps have become permanent. Managed by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), they are funded almost exclusively by the European Union.

Unless the economic and material conditions of people in Chad get better, the situation with regard to religious freedom cannot be expected to improve.

Endnotes

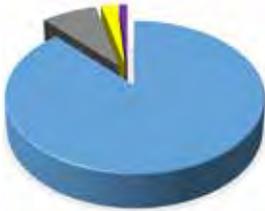
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- 2 "Tschad - Geschichte und Staat", Das Länder-Informations-Portal, Deutschen Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ): <http://liportal.giz.de/tschad/geschichte-staat/>, (accessed on 3rd April 2018).
- 3 "Munzinger Länder: Tschad", Munzinger Archiv 2018, www.munzinger.de/search/login (accessed on 3rd April 2018).
- 4 Chad's Constitution, op.cit.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, "Chad", International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016/>, (accessed on 3rd April 2018).
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Cf. "Chad", Religious Freedom Report 2016, Aid to the Church in Need, <http://religious-freedom-report.org/report/chad/>, (accessed on 4th April 2018).
- 10 "Dutzende Tote bei Selbstmordanschlägen im Tschad", Zeit-Online, 11th October 2015, <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2015-10/boko-haram-anschlag-tschad>, (accessed on 4th April 2018).
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- 14 Ibid.
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- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.
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- 23 "The Bishops: "The Country is in crisis, but we must resist the temptation of discouragement and violence", agenzia fides, 13th January 2017, http://www.fides.org/en/news/61515-AFRICA_CHAD_The_Bishops_The_Country_is_in_crisis_but_we_must_resist_the_temptation_of_discouragement_and_violence, (accessed on 4th April 2018).
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- 25 Ibid.
- 26 "Soziale und politische Spannungen: Kirche fördert Gemeinwohl, op. cit.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Martin Durm, "Hier wird keiner mehr leben wollen", tagesschau.de, 24th March 2018, <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/sahel--zone-migranten-101.html>, (accessed on 4th April 2018).

RELIGION



- Christians: 88,2%
- Agnostics: 8,2%
- Atheists: 2,4%
- Others: 1,2%



AREA	POPULATION
756.102km ²	18.132.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution¹ states that people are born free and equal in dignity and rights. The state recognises that the “family is the fundamental unit of society” and protects “intermediate groups” through which society is organised and structured. Article 1 declares that the state is at the service of the human person and must help the individual attain the greatest possible spiritual and material fulfilment.

The constitution guarantees freedom of conscience, the expression of all beliefs and the free exercise of all faiths that are not contrary to morality, decency or public order. Religious organisations are allowed to build places of worship in accordance with legal requirements concerning health and safety. Under article 19(6), places of worship and other buildings intended exclusively for worship are exempt from taxes.

Chile’s constitution and laws protect religious freedom for more than 2,000 recognised religious groups in the country. Any religious group can apply for non-profit status. The Ministry of Justice cannot refuse a petition for registration, but it can object to any submission within 90 days if there are shortcomings regarding the legal prerequisites in the application. The applicant then has 60 days to object to the points made by the state or seek redress in court. The state cannot de-register a religious organisation after acceptance. Each recognised religious group in the country can set up its own schools, clubs as well as any other organisations.

The Rules on the Legal Constitution of Churches and Religious Organisations are set out under Law No. 19,638 of 1999, which provides that no one shall be discriminated on the basis of their religious beliefs. It enshrines freedom of religion and worship, with autonomy and immunity from coercion, so that everyone can freely profess the religious belief of their choice by engaging in acts of worship in public or in private, individually or collectively, celebrate festivities, and perform their rites or none at all, as well as the freedom for people to leave their religion. The manner of religious education or training received is the concern of each individual or organisation.² Also, under Law No. 20.609 there are measures against arbitrary discrimination, banning any form of exclusion or restriction that lacks reasonable justification that causes deprivation, upheaval or threat

in the legitimate exercise of fundamental rights. This applies particularly when they are based on specific grounds including race, ethnicity or religion. Differential treatment is deemed reasonable, however, when the person is exercising other legitimate fundamental rights such as freedom of conscience, the expression of all beliefs and the free exercise of all religions.³ The laws of the country must have regard to the nation's constitution, in particular to the rights and duties as detailed under article 19.

In the case of abortion, conscientious objection applies to individual medical staff and can also be invoked by an institution.⁴

Incidents

In October 2016 Communist Party Deputy Camila Vallejo proposed the elimination of the invocation of God's name in the opening of the sessions of the Chamber of Deputies and its commissions in order to ensure the secular nature of the Chilean state.⁵

In September 2017 President Michelle Bachelet and other political leaders attended a Thanksgiving service organised by a number of Evangelical Churches to mark the country's Independence Day. During the ceremony, some pastors spoke out against the president and harshly criticised the government's abortion and marriage equality bills. The president was also insulted by the public outside the church. The government expressed its displeasure with such behaviour, after which an Evangelical bishop said that he would send a letter of apology to the president.⁶

In June 2017 the Inter-religious Advisory Council of the National Religious Affairs Bureau (Oficina Nacional de Asuntos Religiosos, ONAR) released a Code of Ethics to promote a culture of peace. It called on all religions and worldviews to adhere to it.⁷ In September 2017 with ONAR's support, the Interreligious Dialogue Association for Human Development (Asociación de Diálogo Interreligioso para el Desarrollo Humano, ADIR) was launched to promote inter-religious dialogue.⁸

During the 2016-2018 period, a draft law to legalise abortion in three situations (risk to the woman's life, non-viability of the foetus and rape) was debated. Several churches spoke out against the proposed legislation. The bill was approved in September 2017, including the right of doctors and other medical staff to conscientious objection. The Constitutional Court ruled that the law must allow institutions to claim the right to conscientious objection as well.⁹ In January 2018 the protocol for conscientious objection by individuals and institutions was approved. However, it did not allow institutions to exercise the right of conscientious objection if they had signed agreements with National Health Care Service to provide gynaecological and obstetric services. Two Church-linked hospitals challenged the protocol in an appeal. In March, after a new government came into office, a new protocol was adopted overruling that of January; however, the country's General Accounting Office ruled that neither protocol complied with the law.¹⁰

During the period under review, the feast day of Saint Lawrence and the days of Pope Francis's visit were declared holidays for religious reasons.¹¹

In January 2018 Pope Francis visited Chile. In the event, the visit was complicated by the fact that it took place in the middle of a sexual-abuse crisis involving the Church and saw a low turn-out among the faithful.¹² During the visit, the Municipality of Iquique erected a ten-metre cross at the city's entrance, which now stands as a memorial to the Pope's visit.¹³

Attacks against churches, including arson, continued in the Araucanía region. In June 2016, during a service at an Evangelical church in a rural district, a group of gunmen entered the place of worship and set it on fire. In April 2018 two of those involved in this incident were convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison.¹⁴ In September 2017 unidentified individuals burnt three churches in different Mapuche communities.¹⁵ A series of attacks took place both before and after Pope Francis's visit, mostly against Catholic places of worship: four arson attacks were reported in the capital, while seven more occurred in the Araucanía, with six Catholic chapels and one Evangelical chapel destroyed. In some cases, pamphlets opposing the papal visit were found. The attacks were linked to the Mapuche, an indigenous people pursuing land claims.¹⁶ Chilean President Bachelet condemned the attacks.¹⁷

Other attacks against churches included an incident in June 2016 when hooded men burst into a church in central Santiago. They took a religious image of the crucified Christ into the street and broke it into pieces.¹⁸ In September 2017 a youth found guilty of damaging a national monument and desecrating sacred objects was convicted.¹⁹ In July 2016 two exterior images of the Cathedral of Melipilla were desecrated and in January 2018, a group of armed individuals entered a Schoenstatt shrine where they threatened some nuns and stole the Virgin's crown.²⁰

During the period under review, traditional religious festivals were celebrated, including the Fiesta de la Tirana, which incorporates religion and Andean worldview,²¹ and the pilgrimage to the Virgin de Lo Vásquez in December, which required the deployment of police and road safety staff. The shrine is located half-way down the highway that connects Santiago to Valparaíso.²²

In May 2018, the Appeal Court in Temuco rejected the writ of amparo (protection) filed by the jailed Machi (Shaman) Celestino Córdova against the Chilean Gendarmerie for denying him a leave of absence to participate in a Mapuche ritual.²³

In May 2018, it was reported that a group of lawmakers planned to present a bill in Congress that would require priests to report crimes of which they had knowledge.²⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

During the period under review, attacks against Churches continued. In the central region, attacks were apparently linked to criticism of the Catholic Church. In the Araucanía, they seem to be connected to the conflict over land claims involving the Mapuche people. However, some observers believe that extremist groups have seized on this issue, taking advantage of the situation in an effort to destabilise the social order. Most Mapuche are Christians who are affected by the attacks. Other violent and non-violent acts have been

reported in connection with religious matters, unrelated to the Mapuche cause. This is indicative of a climate of intolerance on the part of both believers and non-believers. Police have prosecuted violent acts and courts have tried cases.

There are also some positive signs with respect to religious tolerance. Traditional festivals and grassroots religious celebrations continue to take place in public. The Association of Inter-religious Dialogue for Human Development was created with government support. Even though attacks against churches have persisted, most of them have been concentrated in one region and are not representative of the general climate of respect and peaceful coexistence among religions in the country. Stopping attacks against places of worship and other religious sites remains a challenge that the state must meet to ensure freedom of religion across the country.

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CHINA (WITH HONG KONG)

RELIGION



- Agnostics: 31.3%
- Chinese Folk Religionists: 29.9%
- Buddhists: 16%
- Christians: 9,3%
- Atheists: 6,9%
- Ethnoreligionists: 4,3%
- Muslims: 1,7%
- Others: 0,6%



AREA	POPULATION
9.600.000km ²	1,390,266,000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

According to article 36 of China's constitution, the citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No one, state agency or private individual, can force people to believe or not believe in a religion or discriminate on the basis of religious beliefs. "The state protects normal religious activities" and prohibits the use of religion for activities that "disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state." Religious organisations and activities must not be "subject to any foreign domination".¹

In practice, article 36 of the constitution protects only the activities of the five officially recognised religious traditions – Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism – and only those governed by seven state-sanctioned "patriotic" associations. Religious practice or expression outside the state-controlled apparatus is illegal and has been met to varying degrees over the past 70 years with punishment, repression and persecution.

On 1st February 2018, new Regulations on Religious Affairs came into effect, which amount to the most restrictive new laws on religious practice in 13 years. They update the 2005 Regulations on Religious Affairs and confine many religious activities to registered sites. However, permission for a registered site is only granted once the applicant proves that their religious community needs to conduct regular collective religious activities. The regulations introduce new restrictions on online religious expression, proselytising and contain specific provisions in regard to religion, national security, and foreign contacts.²

In a further development, on 21st March 2018 Chinese state media announced that the United Front Work Department, an agency of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), would now oversee ethnic and religious affairs, replacing the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA). The United Front Work Department will absorb SARA, giving the Communist Party direct management of religious affairs.³

In April 2018 the Chinese government issued a new White Paper titled "China's Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief". According to the White Paper,

“active guidance” will be provided to religious organisations to help them “adapt to the socialist society” and foreigners can only engage in religious activity that is “authorised”.⁴ Religion, according to the White Paper, must serve the Communist Party.

Article 27 of China’s National Security Law also relates to freedom of religion or belief. This law has been criticised by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for its “extraordinarily broad scope” and vague terminology, which, he argues, leaves “the door wide open to further restrictions of the rights and freedoms of Chinese citizens, and to even tighter control of civil society.”⁵

Other regulations that may impact freedom of religion or belief include “Document 9”, a notice from the Central Committee of the Communist Party’s General Office, from April 2013, and a new law on foreign Non-Governmental Organisations, adopted in 2016. “Document 9” presents “Western” values, “Western Constitutional Democracy” and “the West’s idea of journalism” as in conflict with the Chinese Communist Party’s values and claims that petitions and letters calling for protection of human rights are the work of “Western anti-China forces.”⁶

The new NGO Law, which came into force in January 2017, gives the police unprecedented power to restrict the work of foreign groups in the country, and to limit the ability of local groups to receive foreign funding and work with foreign organisations. Foreign NGOs are required to have a Chinese government organisation as a sponsor, be registered with the police and be under the supervision of the Public Security Bureau. Police have new powers to arbitrarily summon representatives of foreign organisations in China, seize documents, examine bank accounts and revoke registration. Foreigners or foreign organisations deemed to be involved in activities aimed at “splitting the state, damaging national unity or subverting state power”⁷ can be detained, barred from leaving the country, or deported.⁸

Despite continuing talks between the Vatican and the Government of the People’s Republic of China, the Catholic Church’s status in China continues to be complex. Officially, the state-recognised Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association is not in communion with Rome, while the unregistered, “underground” Catholic Church remains recognised by and in communion with the Pope. However, it is more complicated as some state-recognised bishops and clergy are also recognised by the Vatican, and in many parts of China lay Catholics attend Mass in both official and underground Catholic churches.

In April 2016, China’s President Xi Jinping addressed senior Communist Party officials at a meeting on religion and said that “religious groups . . . must adhere to the leadership of the Communist Party”. Party members must be “unyielding Marxist atheists” who “resolutely guard against overseas infiltrations via religious means.”⁹ This followed a speech by the director of China’s State Administration for Religious Affairs, who told a seminar on the Sinicisation of Christianity that “Chinese Christian theology should be compatible with the country’s path of socialism.”¹⁰ The legislative framework his government has introduced is clearly designed to fulfil that objective.

Incidents

Repression of religious activity has intensified over the past five years, throughout the country. Between 2014 and 2016, authorities in Zhejiang Province forcibly removed thousands of crosses from churches and destroyed part or all of some church buildings. Conservative estimates claim that between 1,500 and 1,700 churches were affected, and some estimate as many as 2,000.¹¹

An increasing number of Christian clergy have been arrested and sentenced to prison terms. Living Stone Church in Guizhou Province has been particularly targeted since 2015.¹² Yang Hua, one of the Church's pastors, was placed under criminal detention in December 2015 on the charge of illegally possessing state secrets. He was formally arrested on 22nd January 2016, and a year later he was sentenced to two and a half years in prison. He is believed to have been denied medical treatment and in March 2017 his lawyers reported, after visiting him in prison, that Pastor Yang Hua was "on the verge of paralysis".¹³ His fellow pastor, Su Tianfu, was sentenced to a year in prison in May 2018, suspended for two years, with a further six months under residential surveillance. Both pastors were also fined US\$1 million for collecting "illegal" donations from their congregation.

In Sichuan Province, over 200 members of the Early Rain Church in Chengdu were detained by authorities in May 2018, to prevent them from holding a prayer vigil for victims of the 2008 Sichuan (Wenchuan) earthquake. Pastor Wang Yi was detained by police on 11th May 2018 and accused of "picking quarrels and causing trouble".¹⁴

In April 2018 authorities in Henan Province demolished crosses and churches, destroyed religious materials and prohibited children under the age of 18 from attending Protestant and Catholic churches. On 17th April 2018, a Catholic Church in Luoyang was demolished, along with the priest's residence. The tombstone of Bishop Li Hongye, who was appointed by the Vatican but not recognised by the government, was reportedly demolished, and two priests from the same diocese were driven out of their parish. On 4th April the Pingyuan Neighbourhood Committee issued a notice ordering Christians, Buddhists, Taoists and Muslims to register with the government. Churches have been ordered to fly the Chinese flag and sing the national anthem.¹⁵

In April 2018 the Bible was banned from sale online in China¹⁶ and the two official state-controlled Protestant bodies announced they would be producing a new "secularised" version of the Bible compatible with Sinicisation and socialism.¹⁷

In March 2018, during Holy Week, Catholic underground Bishop Vincent Guo Xijing was briefly detained in Fujian province.¹⁸ In recent years underground Catholic clergy have regularly been arrested, including Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin in Wenzhou, Zhejiang, who was arrested by police on 18th May 2017 but released in January 2018; Father Yang Jianwei in Hebei Province, who has been missing since April 2017; and Bishop James Su Zhimin, detained on 8th October 1997 in Hebei.

In Yunnan province, six members of an unregistered church group were jailed on 18th January 2018 for up to 13 years for using "an evil cult to organise to undermine law enfor-

cement".¹⁹ In Shanxi province earlier in January, the Chinese authorities demolished the Golden Lampstand (Jindengtai) Church using dynamite. The church had 50,000 members.²⁰

In December 2017, a 25-old Catholic Church in Shaanxi province was demolished, despite having the necessary permits from the Religious Affairs Bureau.²¹ This follows reports towards the end of 2017 that Christians in some parts of the country were being offered money to take down pictures of Jesus Christ and crosses and replace them with portraits of China's President Xi Jinping.²²

Violations of freedom of religion or belief are also increasingly affecting Muslims, particularly among the Uighur population in Xinjiang province, and Buddhists among the Tibetan community and the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

In January 2018 it was reported that more than 100,000 Uighur Muslims were being held in "re-education" camps in Xinjiang province.²³ In recent years Chinese authorities have prohibited Uighur Muslims from observing Ramadan, including reportedly assigning Communist Party officials to live in Uighur homes to prevent them from fasting and praying. New regulations prohibit face veils and beards, authorities have banned parents giving their children Islamic names, and Uighur Muslims' passports and Qur'ans have been confiscated.²⁴ In 2014 Ilham Tohti, a prominent Uighur scholar who has been a moderate voice for freedom of religion or belief for his people and advocates peaceful dialogue, was given a life sentence. He was accused of supporting separatism, even though he has repeatedly rejected separatism and advocated dialogue.

For Tibetan Buddhists, repression continues, with the eviction of Buddhists from their institutions and the demolition of some Buddhist institutes in the name of a "renovation" campaign. In 2016 hundreds of homes at Larung Gar Buddhist Institute in Sertar, Sichuan province – one of the largest Buddhist teaching centres in the world – were demolished,²⁵ and up to 1,000 Buddhist nuns were forced to leave another Buddhist centre, Yachen (Yarchen) Gar, and return to their home towns.²⁶

Falun Gong, described as "an ancient Buddha School practice", has continued to face severe persecution since 1999, following an order from the then Chinese President Jiang Zemin to eradicate the practice, reportedly declaring, as per reports by a Falun Gong news organ (The Epoch Times): "Destroy their reputations, cut them off financially, and eradicate them physically".²⁷ In 2016 a major new report, "Bloody Harvest/The Slaughter: An Update", written by a former Canadian parliamentarian David Kilgour, human rights lawyer David Matas, and journalist Ethan Gutmann alleged that the practice of forced organ harvesting – the involuntary removal of prisoners' internal organs, which are then sold for transplant – was continuing on a much larger scale than previously thought. Falun Gong practitioners are believed to be among the primary victims of this practice.²⁸

In addition to the arrests, detention, imprisonment and harassment of religious adherents in China, recent years have also seen an unprecedented crackdown on human rights lawyers and human rights defenders, many of whom have taken up freedom of religion cases. In July 2015 over 300 human rights lawyers and activists, as well as their colleagues

and relatives, were arrested, interrogated and in some cases imprisoned or disappeared.²⁹ Wang Quanzhang has been held incommunicado since July 2015.³⁰

HONG KONG

When the United Kingdom handed over Hong Kong to China in 1997, the territory was established as a Special Autonomous Region of China, with a high degree of autonomy, basic freedoms and human rights, and the rule of law under the principle of “one country, two systems”. The Sino-British Joint Declaration, which is a legal treaty lodged at the United Nations, recognises China’s full sovereignty over the territory, but provides Britain with a continued responsibility to monitor and ensure the protection of Hong Kong’s way of life for the first 50 years after the handover, until 2047.

For the first 15 years of Chinese rule, “one country, two systems” was generally respected and implemented. However, in recent years many of Hong Kong’s civil and political freedoms in Hong Kong have become increasingly threatened. Violations include the abduction of booksellers who published books critical of the Chinese government, the disqualification of pro-democracy legislators, the imprisonment of pro-democracy activists involved in leading peaceful demonstrations, increasing restrictions on press freedom and academic freedom, the introduction of mainland Chinese law into the West Kowloon railway station for passengers travelling to the mainland on the high-speed rail link, the denial of entry to Hong Kong for British human rights activist Benedict Rogers in 2017 and the expulsion from Hong Kong of the Asia News Editor of the Financial Times Victor Mallet in 2018. However, so far freedom of religion or belief in Hong Kong is one of the few freedoms which generally continues to be protected.

Hong Kong’s Basic Law, which is the territory’s mini-constitution, guarantees freedom of conscience, freedom of religious belief and freedom to preach, conduct and participate in religious activities in public, and grants the Hong Kong authorities autonomy in religious affairs on Hon. The Bill of Rights Ordinance incorporates the religious freedom protections of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).³¹ Places of worship operate freely and religious groups are exempt from the legal requirement for non-governmental organisations to register. Private schools are able to offer religious education, and government schools, while following the government curriculum, may offer students non-mandatory religious education. The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Christian Council, the Chinese Muslim Cultural and Fraternal Association, the Hong Kong Taoist Association, the Confucian Academy and the Hong Kong Buddhist Association are all represented in the 1,200-member Election Committee to elect Hong Kong’s chief executive.

There has been some harassment of Falun Gong practitioners by groups believed to be associated with the Chinese Communist Party, although Falun Gong practitioners are generally able to practise their beliefs in Hong Kong, whereas they are banned in mainland China. There are also concerns that new regulations on religious practice in

mainland China might restrict the activities of religious groups based in Hong Kong but working in mainland China.

Longer-term, however, there are concerns about the impact on religious freedom of the political activities of some Hong Kong pro-democracy leaders who are Christians, and the reluctance of some churches in Hong Kong to associate with pro-democracy activists among their community, but until now there has been no notable impact on freedom of religion or belief. And if other civil and political rights continue to be eroded and restricted, threats to freedom of religion or belief may increase. Pro-democracy activist Derek Lam, who is a Christian and has declared his desire to become a pastor, warns of dangers ahead. Writing in the *New York Times* in August 2017, he argues that in a sign of worse to come, “increasingly, we are also unable to express our faith freely. This year in particular saw an unprecedented erosion of religious freedom in Hong Kong, especially for Christians.”³² He claims that: “Every summer, Hong Kong’s Christians organise youth camps in which thousands of teenagers gather to have fun, dance to Christian rock and learn about Christian values. During the last evening of one of this summer’s camps, the leaders of the camp told the campers that ‘God would make China prosperous’ and that Xi Jinping’s pet infrastructure project known as ‘One Belt, One Road’ was ‘the path that God had prepared’. The organisers of the camp then had the audacity to claim that ‘One Belt, One Road’ would help spread the gospel. This perverse co-opting of Christianity is consistent with what I have witnessed myself. In 2011, when I was 17, I spent the year founding and organising a student organisation called Scholarism along with Joshua Wong, now Hong Kong’s most well-known political activist. That year, our government had announced a plan to overhaul the curriculum to what amounted to a mandatory course in nationalistic brainwashing. Scholarism helped mobilise protests and the “patriotic” curriculum was scrapped. That summer, I attended one of the city’s biggest Christian youth camps. I was eager to share my democratic views with my fellow campers, but instead I witnessed young people being encouraged to proudly declare themselves as Chinese, waving the Chinese Communist Party’s flag, singing the national anthem and praising the ‘motherland.’”

Derek Lam noted that Hong Kong’s new Catholic bishop, Michael Yeung Ming-Cheung, has been reluctant to speak out against the destruction of churches in mainland China: “During a news conference on August 1, his first day as bishop, he emphasised several times how important pragmatism was to him, saying: ‘We should not rush into a wall if we already know that the wall is solid.’ And, instead of expressing his concern for the members of the demolished churches in Zhejiang Province, he toed the party line and claimed the churches were bulldozed because of ‘structural safety concerns.’”

Mr Lam concluded that: “Although there is nothing I would love more than to become a pastor and preach the gospel in Hong Kong, I will never do so if it means making Jesus subservient to Xi Jinping. Instead, I will continue to fight for religious freedom in Hong Kong, even if I have to do it from behind bars. What I ask of you is to keep Hong Kong in your prayers as we seek to find light amid the sea of darkness descending upon us.”

Prospects for freedom of religion

China's President Xi Jinping has unleashed the most severe crackdown on human rights in China since, many would say, the Tiananmen massacre of 1989. Across the board, freedom of expression and space for civil society and dissent are severely restricted, while repression is increasing in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong. Violations of freedom of religion or belief must be seen in this context. With the introduction of new, even more restrictive regulations on religious practice, the destruction of churches and crosses, the grave and brutal repression of the Uighur Muslims, and Xi Jinping's own remarks about the role of religion, the prospects for freedom of religion or belief improving in China under the current government are extremely low. Repression is predicted to continue and to further increase and intensify.

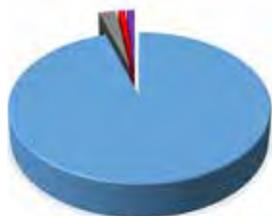
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COLOMBIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 95,2%
- Agnostics: 2,6%
- Spiritists: 1%
- Others: 1,2%



AREA	POPULATION
1.141.748 km ²	48.654.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application¹

Article one of the constitution of Colombia² defines the country as a state bound by the rule of law. The constitution states that the republic is democratic, and pluralist and founded on the respect for human dignity, solidarity and the primacy of the general interest. The government oversees agencies which protect life, dignity, beliefs and other legally established individual liberties.

The Colombian state bans all forms of discrimination, including on religious grounds. The right to freedom of conscience, religion and worship are recognised as fundamental rights.³

According to the Constitutional Court of Colombia, the highest court protecting fundamental rights, freedom of conscience is realised in three ways: "(i) no one may be subject to bullying or persecution because of their convictions or beliefs; (ii) no person shall be obliged to reveal their convictions, and (iii) no one shall be compelled to act against their conscience"⁴ However, the right to freedom of conscience is not absolute and comes with limits based on respect for the rights of others.

Although closely linked, the right to freedom of conscience is understood in Colombia as a right distinct from that of religious freedom. Hence, the state of Colombia guarantees the right to freedom of conscience, while prohibiting activities opposed to religious beliefs.⁵

Following on from a concordat with the Holy See, article 19 of the constitution states that "all religious faiths and churches are equally free before the law"⁶ Hence, the Colombian Ministry of the Interior includes a Religious Affairs Bureau responsible for giving legal recognition to non-Catholic religious groups. According to Ministry of the Interior data, there are "6,500 religious entities in the state registry, and more than 90 percent of people profess a religious belief"⁷ Christians represent 95 percent of the Colombian population, and 90.04 percent of them are Catholics.

On 6th March 2018, the Colombian Ministry of the Interior implemented Decree 437, a new Public Policy on Religious Freedom.⁸ It is too early to measure its success.

Incidents

In February 2017, the Constitutional Court ruled on a citizen initiative challenging the constitutionality of Law 891 of 2004, “by which the Processions of Holy Week and the Religious Music Festival of Popayán are declared part of the National Cultural Heritage”. Although the plaintiffs stated that this law violated freedom of religion and worship, the court ruled that there was no infringement on these rights since the law does not establish an official religion but simply declares such festivities as part of Colombia’s national cultural heritage. The court stated that the law complied with the constitutional obligation of the state to recognise and extol the nation’s non-material cultural heritage.⁹

On 27th July 2017, Father Diomer Chavarría was assassinated in the parish of Puerto Valdivia. The clergyman “made the ultimate sacrifice in the exercise of his mission last night, 27th July”,¹⁰ said the diocese in a statement.

Father Abelardo Antonio Muñoz Sánchez, 41, was murdered when two criminals confronted him as he was getting out of a taxi on 3rd October 2018 in San Antonio, a neighbourhood in Rionegro, a town on the main road to La Ceja.¹¹ That same month saw criminals desecrate a cemetery in the town of Palmira. Speaking about these and related incidents, Father Dimas Orozco, the parish priest of La Buitrera, said that there are “many people who practise satanic rituals and what they do is remove the bones of the deceased to perform sacrilegious acts”.¹²

On 22nd May 2018, “a group of unidentified individuals attacked the Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Bogotá,” the Diocese of Fontibón reported. The criminals broke several windows of the shrine and damaged the parish office, the auditoriums and the clergy house, home of Fr Jesús Hernán Orjuela.¹³ Similarly, the cemeteries of Puente Sogamoso and Honda were desecrated.¹⁴

Perhaps the legal proceedings that came closest to having religious connotations in Colombia was Judgement C-100 of 2018.¹⁵ On 22nd March, the Constitutional Court rejected an application by a prisoner who, as a Pentecostal, claimed that his rights to freedom of religion and worship were infringed upon because he was not allowed to work on Sundays and holidays to reduce his sentence. For him, his rights were being violated since he was forced to recognise Catholic holy days.¹⁶ In their ruling, the Court made it clear that such rights are not absolute and come with reasonable limits. In this particular case, the prisoner’s right to freedom of worship was not violated; instead, such a ban is intended to guarantee prisoners a time of rest, with the possibility of working on said days as long as the prison director permits it.¹⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

Religious freedom in Colombia is directly shaped by the country’s complex political situation, which has been overshadowed by conflict. A resurgence of violence has put clergy and other religious at risk, especially in areas of armed conflict.¹⁸ Incidents of this kind have multiplied over the past two years with the emergence of armed criminal gangs

in several parts of the country. In these regions, violence has caused the displacement of more than 6.8 million Colombians over the last 50 years, including more than 63,000 last year and so far this year. This means that Colombia, according to the report of the Unified Victims Registry, has the second largest internally displaced population in the world after Syria.¹⁹

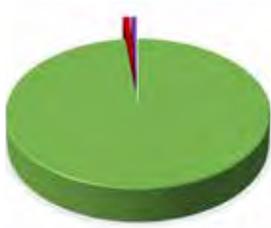
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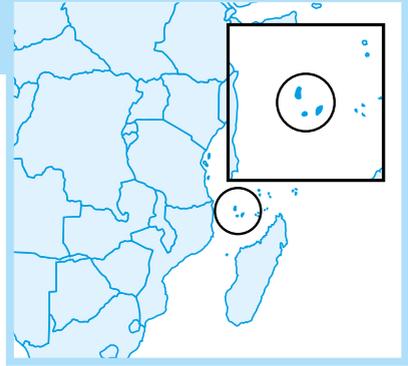
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COMOROS

RELIGION



- Muslims: 98,3%
- Ethnoreligionists: 1%
- Others: 0,7%



AREA	POPULATION
2.235km ²	807.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

According to the 2001 constitution, Islam is the state religion.¹ The constitution's preamble affirms equality in rights and duties without making any reference to sex, origin, race, religion or belief.² Religion falls under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Union (Article 9).³

Not all Islamic groups are allowed in Comoros. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, only the Sunni Shafite rite of the Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah doctrine is allowed in the country.⁴ All forms of proselytism or religious propaganda of all religions other than the above-mentioned Sunni school are prohibited. Foreigners involved in such activities may be deported.

There is continuous pressure and intimidation against any local converts to Christianity; foreigners, however, are free of this threat.⁵ Pressure to conform to orthodox Muslim regulations and customs are felt everywhere. The government does not seem to be even-handed in its punishment of followers of other religions.⁶

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is working with the National Mufti Council (muftiate) to improve control over imams and preachers by introducing a "professional card" of academic and religious competence.⁷ It seems this move is intended to prevent religious radicalism.

Incidents

On 11th October 2016, the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued a ban on non-Sunni practices.⁸ Over the following days, some Shi'a clerics in Moroni and Mutsamudu were temporarily arrested after they were caught celebrating the Ashura Festival in private homes.⁹

On 30th November 2016, the Council of Ministers banned the celebration of the Mawlid (Birth of the Prophet) festival in all state corporations, but allowed the one organised by the government in Independence Square.¹⁰

Government officials ordered that the minarets of an Ahmadiyya Muslim mosque in Anjouan be torn down on 8th January 2017. The Minister of Internal Affairs Mohamed Daoudou ordered the demolition, accusing the Ahmadis of supporting sedition. The rest

of the building was turned into a police station.¹¹ In a statement, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs distanced itself from this decision.¹²

On 4th April 2017, the ulemas of Comoros called on the government to take measures to stop local radios from broadcasting “Yiyo Yiremwa”, a song by local artist Ali Combo, claiming the song “threatens good practices”.¹³

On 4th September 2017, the authorities in the village of Nioumadzaha Bambao (Ngazi-dja) chased away a local preacher nicknamed “Pilote” after accusing him of supporting “subversive” religious ideas.¹⁴

Twenty-eight people were sentenced on 9th September 2017 to between one and two months in prison for celebrating the Aid-el-Kebir on Friday 1st September instead of Saturday 2nd September, the officially designated day set by the Grand Mufti. They had been accused of threatening social cohesion and religious unity.¹⁵ The public prosecutor stressed that the Comoros is not a secular state.¹⁶

Prospects for freedom of religion

There is no freedom of religion in Comoros except for the one Sunni Shafite rite. There is no indication that there will be any changes in the near future.

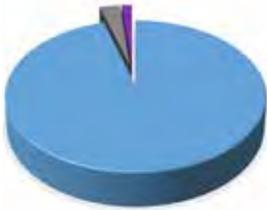
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COSTA RICA

RELIGION



- Christians: 95,5%
- Agnostics: 3%
- Others: 1,5%



AREA

51.100km²

POPULATION

4.857.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The name of God is invoked in the preamble of the constitution.¹

Articles 25 and 26 of the constitution state grant citizens the right to associate for lawful purposes and to assemble peacefully. Nobody can be forced to belong to any association: "No one may be disturbed or persecuted for the expression of their opinions ...". According to Article 28, members of the clergy cannot engage in political propaganda based on religion.

The constitution recognises Roman Catholicism as the state religion but does not object to the free exercise of other beliefs provided they do not contravene universal moral standards and customs. Article 75 states that Costa Rica's status as the only confessional state in Spanish-speaking America does not in any way impede other religious expressions, provided they are within the law.

In order to be president or vice-president candidates must, according to article 131, be secular in status.

Public officials must take an oath, as stipulated in article 194: "Do you swear to God and promise to the Fatherland, to observe and defend the constitution and the laws of the republic?"

Law No. 6062 grants the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Costa Rica and each of the dioceses both official legal status and full legal rights.²

Education Law No. 2160 establishes that the school system should pursue, among other things, the development of ethical and religious values in accordance with Christian traditions. One goal of primary education is to nurture spiritual, moral and religious development. All students are to be granted access to private tuition irrespective of religious differences.³

The Labour Code (Article 90, b) bans children under the age of 15 from working, except for activities related to religious worship. The code goes on to establish that people belonging to religions other than Catholicism may ask for time off work to fulfil religious

obligations. These must be previously registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship.⁴

Marriages celebrated by the Catholic Church in conformity with the Family Code are recognised as civil matrimonial contracts. Article 25 states: “Celebrating ministers [...] shall be considered public officials.”⁵

Incidents

In January 2018, pictures were posted on Facebook apparently depicting Jesus at the Last Supper. The bishops’ conference described it as a “disrespectful act towards the Most Holy Eucharist.”⁶

As of 20th January 2018, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (SET) received 31 complaints relating to religion in connection with the political campaign leading up to the presidential election of 4th February.⁷

In February 2018, the Jewish group Bnai Brith Costa Rica called for respect and tolerance in opposition to verbal violence, discrimination and anti-religious attacks during the second round of voting.⁸

On 6th March 2018, the SET ruled that a joint declaration by the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Alliance Federation constituted a threat to the free exercise of the franchise and ordered them to abstain from this type of action.⁹ The case refers to a statement issued at a day of prayer held by both organisations before the elections. The ruling states that “freedom must be protected against any religious influence”. Consequently, “it is not appropriate, under the protection of such roles [of bishops and pastors] to use their influence to sway the free decision of voters who share their ideology.”¹⁰

The drafting of the proposed Law on Freedom of Religion and Worship is still pending. The bill, which was introduced in April 2014, seeks to guarantee the specific rights to be granted with respect to the exercise of freedom of religion. It envisages, among other things, measures intended to regulate religious organisations, their autonomy and worship.¹¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

The period reviewed includes several episodes symptomatic of tensions between the authorities and religious organisations. Of note in this context are the rulings of the Inter-American Court and the sentence by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal against the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Alliance Federation. The prospects for freedom of religion are poor to the extent that the right to religious expression in the public sphere is being eroded.

Endnotes

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RELIGION



- Christians: 93,9%
- Agnostics: 2,7%
- Muslims: 2%
- Atheists: 1,4%



AREA	POPULATION
56.594km ²	4.225.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The country's constitution guarantees freedom of religion.¹ All religious communities are equal under the law. There is no official state religion. Religious communities are free to conduct public religious services as well as run schools and charitable organisations. A faith group needs at least 500 members and five years of registered operation to be recognised as a religious community.

The Croatian state has entered into separate legal agreements with different religious communities.² These agreements regulate issues such how much state subsidy employees of the various communities should receive, their eligibility for state pensions, state support for the upkeep and renovation of religious buildings, chaplains' access to prisons, military and state institutions,³ special food requirements for Adventists and Muslims and provision for paid leave for Muslims for religious festivals which are not state holidays. There is official recognition of marriages conducted by religious communities which have agreements with the state; this dispenses with the need to register the marriages at the civil registry office. Public schools allow religious teaching in cooperation with religious communities which have agreements with the state, but attendance is optional. In primary schools, about 90 percent of all children receive religious education classes about the Catholic faith. In high schools, about 65 percent of students receive Catholic education classes (the alternative is courses on Ethics). Non-registered religious communities are not allowed to provide religious education in schools or have access to state funds for religious activities.

There were 54 registered religious communities by the end of 2017 including the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Christian Adventist Church, the Church of God, the Church of Christ, the Pentecostal Church, the Evangelical Church, the Coordination of Jewish Communities in Croatia, the Croatian Old Catholic Church, the Islamic Community of Croatia, the Reformed Christian Church, the Union of Baptist Churches, the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, the Union of Pentecostal Churches of Christ, the Church of the Full Gospel, the Word of Life Alliance of Churches, the Protestant Reformed Christian Church and Bet Israel.

Public holidays in Croatia include a number of the Catholic religious holidays; it is legal for non-Catholics to celebrate other major religious holidays.

The Catholic Church is the dominant religious community. The government recognised the Church's historical and cultural role and its social position by signing four agreements of mutual interest with the Holy See in the period from 1996 to 1998.⁴ These concordats mandate government funding for pensions and salaries of certain religious personnel through government pensions and health budgets.

The agreements also regulate public school religious education and military chaplains. The other 16 religious groups, which have agreements with the state, may offer religious education in schools, provided that at any one school there are at least seven followers of the faith in question.

There are 17 ecclesiastical circumscriptions and 1,598 parishes in Croatia. There are currently 25 bishops, 2,343 priests and 3,711 religious.⁵ There is one Catholic TV channel, Laudato TV. There are two Catholic radio stations and many weekly and monthly magazines. There are also several Catholic internet news portals popular with Catholics. There are many Catholic professional associations, but membership is generally drawn from the lower tiers of the workforce. Vocations to the priesthood and male religious life are relatively stable but female vocations are decreasing. The role of lay people increased almost immediately after the introduction of religious instruction in schools. The clergy and laity are united against secularism.

There is public space for demonstrations by faith groups on issues of social importance. For example, Croatia's "March for Life" was held on 20th May 2017. According to the police and local media, the event attracted 20,000 people in the capital, Zagreb, and up to 5,000 in the country's second largest city, Split.⁶

A sign of the good relations between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches is the high level of cooperation involving investigations into a cause for sainthood; the joint Orthodox-Catholic commission into the life of Blessed Aloysius Stepinac held its sixth and final meeting at Domus Sanctae Marthae, Rome, on 12th and 13th July 2017. At the conclusion of the commission's meetings, the Secretariat of the Holy See prepared a joint statement which was adopted by both sides. The document considers that the opinion of both Orthodox and Catholic Churches remains unchanged but acknowledges that ultimately the Pope must make the final decision about the cardinal's cause.⁷ Commission members had come to the conclusion that various events in the Cardinal's life, his speeches, writings, silences, and views are still open to interpretation.

Incidents

In March 2017, the Serbian Orthodox Church released a statement that unknown persons had desecrated Orthodox churches and broken into the Church of Saint Georgije in Kričke and Saint Jovan Krstitelj in Miočić, near Drniš.⁸ The vandals did not rob the Orthodox shrines or desecrate the icons or other religious objects. The statement declared that

the motive for the attack was unclear. The statement added that on 19th March 2017, a church in Medvidja was broken into. The local priest immediately informed the police, who quickly came and investigated. The south door to the church was broken.

Anti-Serbian graffiti including Croatian Second World War Nationalistic emblems were painted on a Serbian Orthodox church in the Croatian town of Sinj.⁹

The Archdiocese of Split Makarska objected to the inclusion of the play 'Our Violence and Your Violence' as part of the 'Marulićevi Dani' theatre festival in Split.¹⁰ The archdiocese claimed that the play, directed by Croatian theatre director Oliver Frlić, is offensive to citizens and faithful, and called on the festival organisers to reconsider including it. The play features a hijab-clad woman being raped by Jesus after pulling a national flag from her genitals. The archdiocese stated that it had acted after receiving many complaints from faithful who were distressed and disgusted by the play.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Relations between the state and church in Croatia depend on which political Party is in power. Catholic believers generally support the non-confessionalism of the country's political structures. Although there is a high percentage of Catholics, Croatia is still an ideologically pluralistic society.

There is huge tension concerning the preferred conception of the state, on the one hand, the secular model, as proposed by the European Union, and on the other, a model where religion has an important role. Compounding the problem is that ethnicity continues to be an significant issue in society, with Croats representing 90 percent and Serbs only 4.4 percent with the rest made up of Bosniacs, Italians, Albanians and Hungarians.

Certain liberal civil society organisations have had a great impact on politics and on the promotion of secularism in Croatia. A radically secular worldview has been expounded, in which athiestic or agnositic views of religion have been proposed in an effort to achieve political neutrality. Advocates of this worldview declare that, in the name of democracy, faith-based communities should be excluded from public debates on social and ethical issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage and euthanasia.

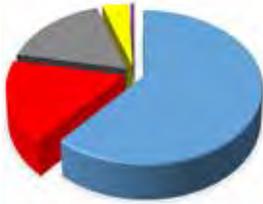
The secular ideology, which portrays faith as a force for ill, is a challenge for the Catholic Church, which has had a significant influence on the national, cultural and religious identity of modern Croatia. This challenge motivates Christians to engage in dialogue about political issues at all levels. It remains to be seen whether Croatia will become an increasingly secular state or whether it will be a place of encounter between religious groups cooperating with political structures for the common good.

Endnotes

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RELIGION



● Christians: 61,1%
● Spiritists: 17,1%
● Agnostics: 16,9%
● Atheists: 4,3%
● Others: 0,6%



AREA	POPULATION
109.884 km ²	11.393.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article five of the Cuban constitution,¹ amended in 2002, describes the Communist Party of Cuba as “the superior leading force of the society and the state”, noting that Cuba’s guiding principles are socialist and that it is a one-party state.

According to the constitution, the state “recognises, respects, and guarantees religious freedom.” Likewise article eight states: “In the Republic of Cuba, religious institutions are separate from the state. The different creeds and religions enjoy equal consideration.”²

Similarly, the state “recognises, respects and guarantees freedom of conscience and religion, [and] simultaneously recognises, respects, and guarantees the freedom of every citizen to change religious creeds, or not to have any; and to profess the religious worship of their choice”. In addition article 55 states: “The law regulates the state’s relations with religious institutions.”³

Article 42 of the constitution states that religious discrimination is punishable by law.

However, it is important to note several passages in the constitution with the potential to clash with freedom of religion. Article 39 deals with education. In its preamble it says: “The state guides, fosters, and promotes education, culture and sciences in all their manifestations.” It goes on: “[The state] bases its educational and cultural policy on [...] the Marxist ideology and the ideas of José Martí,” adding that “Education is a function of the state” which promotes “the patriotic education and communist training for the new generations.”

Looking further at the actual implementation, article 62 states that “None of the freedoms which are recognised for citizens can be exercised contrary to [...] the existence and objectives of the socialist state, or contrary to the decision of the Cuban people to build socialism and communism. Violations of this principle can be punished by law.”

Up until 1992 there was article 54.3 which noted: “It is illegal and punishable to oppose faith or religious belief to the Revolution [...] and the other duties established by the constitution.” There is continuing confusion regarding the current application of such principles, but the latest version of the constitution has removed this article.

It must be noted that, in law and in practice, there are important and significant restrictions on the practice of religious freedom. In this context, for example article 237 of the Cuban Penal Code which states that the crime of “abuse of religious freedom” is punished by detention of three to nine months if the religious practice is inconsistent with certain commitments related to education, labour law and national defence.⁴

Special mention must be made of articles 239 and 240 of the Penal Code, which can entail jail terms of one to three months for affiliation or membership “in an association not registered with the corresponding state agency” or participation in demonstrations and meetings organised by such associations. Any association that has not been authorised is unlawful. The promoters or directors of an unregistered association can be detained for three to nine months.⁵

Religious groups must be registered with the Religious Associations Registry operated by the Ministry of Justice as indicated in the law regarding worship and religious associations. During this process, the organisation is required to identify the place where it will establish its activities and the source of its funding. Legal recognition is denied if the organisation is deemed to duplicate the activities of another group which is already registered. Once recognised, religious entities must request authorisation from the Religious Affairs Office to carry out their own activities.

Although it is not a religion but a set of practices, it has to be acknowledged that many Cubans practice Santería. These quasi-religious practices are commonly intermingled with Catholicism, some groups even demand that practitioners be baptised Catholics to qualify for full initiation; which makes it more difficult to estimate accurately the precise number of Santería practitioners.

The Religious Affairs Office regulates the various aspects of religious life: it approves or denies visits by foreigners to religious associations; approves the construction, repair or acquisition of places of worship; approves the purchase and use of motor vehicles; grants permits to conduct public religious services; regulates the importation of religious literature, etc.

Decisions 43 and 46 of February 2005, published in the Official Gazette (No. 8, April 2005), impose restrictions on the use of places of worship. The first requires that if religious institutions plan to carry out repairs – including minor ones, enlarge existing properties, or begin new works they must have prior government authorisation. The second lays out the guidelines dealing with requesting, processing and authorising services to be held in private homes.⁶

Incidents

In the period under review (June 2016 to June 2018), most of the recorded incidents relate to breaches of the legal restrictions outlined above; however, in many cases the breaches and sanctions have a religious element to them.⁷ In some incidents, the problem was

the arbitrariness with which the laws were applied to religious adherents or individuals motivated by religious principles.⁸

On 24th January 2018, three Catholic priests wrote a letter to Raul Castro denouncing the lack of freedom in Cuba. Priests across the country supported the letter,⁹ which looked at different issues that affect the Cuban people, including the lack of religious freedom, which they summarised as follows:

"The Church is tolerated, but it is constantly monitored and controlled. Complete religious freedom is curbed through a restrictive policy of permits to worship. Christians can meet to share their faith but they are not allowed to build a church. The Church can hold processions and even public Masses, but always on condition of obtaining the express permission from the authorities with, if it is not granted, no allowance for an appeal or an explanation. The Church can speak out in the churches but has no open access to mass media and, in the few circumstances when this happens, it is always under censorship. Lay people are censored when they try to apply their faith to political and social practice."¹⁰

Needless to say, the huge growth in the number of new churches and religious groups connected to different Protestant group has been a clear challenge to existing laws.¹¹ Many of these groups are not recognised and therefore illegal, while others have cult-like characteristics that would also raise questions about their structure and intentions elsewhere in the world.¹²

On 12th November 2006, Rev Ibrahim Pina Borges, pastor of the Universal Pentecostal Church (Iglesia Pentecostal Universal) and a member of the National Christian Alliance (Alianza Nacional Cristiana) presented a draft law on cults and religious associations in Cuba,¹³ to Cuba's parliament, the National Assembly of People's Power. Ten years later, in 2016, Rev Manuel Alberto Morejón Soler of the National Christian Alliance (an umbrella organisation for some 500 Protestant groups not legally recognised), once again asked the National Assembly to respond to the draft law presented by Rev Borges. Although no answer was forthcoming, a meeting in January 2018 between state security officers and Pastor Manuel Morejón to discuss the matter can be seen as a positive step.¹⁴

It is against such the background of restrictions on religious activity that we must view some of the recorded cases listed below:

On 22nd October 2016, Pastor Juan Carlos Núñez Velázquez, a member of the Apostolic Movement, was sentenced to one year's house arrest after neighbours filed complaints against him for violating environmental laws because of the noise generated by the meetings of his community. Rev Núñez Velázquez had been holding services for about 500 co-religionists in his compound. According to his own statements, his sound system had a volume of 150W, and the Sunday service lasted from 9:30 am to 1:00 pm.¹⁵

On 21st February 2017, Pastor Ramón Rigal and his wife, Adya, were arrested and charged with "acting against the normal development of minors" because they had decided to educate their seven and 11-year-old children at home. They were released the next day

and formally ordered to report in person to the police every week until their trial. In April they were given a year of correctional labour under house arrest for refusing to allow their children to be educated in Cuban state schools. In August 2017, Rigal lost his permit to work as a pastor of the Church of God.¹⁶

On 22nd October 2017, Misael Díaz Paseiro, a member of the Orlando Zapata Tamayo Civil Resistance Front, was arrested for “pre-criminal social dangerousness”, that is, he was detained for political rather than religious reasons. However, state security agents seized two Bibles, crucifixes and five rosaries from his home. He was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison. Initially, Paseiro was denied access to his Bible in prison and was not allowed visits from a minister.¹⁷

In March 2018, several media outlets echoed the complaints of Christian ministry group Bíblica after 17,000 copies of New International Version of the Bible were sent back to Miami in 2016 by the Religious Affairs Department of the Communist Party.¹⁸

In a number of cases, defendants from religious communities successfully appealed their convictions, mostly obtaining modifications to their sentences.¹⁹ Churches and faith communities also launched appeals, and in some cases sentences were overturned. The most encouraging case occurred in May 2017, when the superintendent of the Assemblies of God was summoned to the Religious Affairs Office, where government officials announced that the 2015 order seizing more than two thousand churches belonging to the Assemblies of God was being revoked (see ACN’s Religious Freedom in the World 2016 report, Cuba country report). In this case, a written document officially cancelling the demolition order of one of the churches was provided.²⁰

Regarding the restitution of places of worship and buildings once owned by faith communities and confiscated at the time of the Revolution, religious authorities did announce some returns in 2013 and 2014.²¹ In 2015, the construction of three new Catholic churches was authorised for the first time, one in Havana, another in Santiago and a third in the western province of Pinar del Río.²² Since then, there has been no news about any more restitutions or permits.²³ In March 2017, the Italian newspaper La Stampa reported that the parish church of the town of Cobre, which was used previously as a warehouse, was going to be returned to the Diocese of Santiago de Cuba,²⁴ but this has not yet taken place at the end of the period covered by this report.

In recent years, one positive element has been the acceptance by the state of subsidiary charitable²⁵ and educational projects, such as training facilities, nurseries, care centres for seniors and small libraries with religious material.

Equally, some reports indicate that it is becoming easier for foreign clergy and religious to enter the country. Both the Catholic Church and the Church Council of Cuba (Consejo de Iglesia de Cuba) also noted that they were able to conduct religious services in prisons and detention centres in some provinces.

Perspective for freedom of religion

In conclusion, it is clear from the evidence thus far examined that the situation holds out some promise for the future of religious freedom in Cuba. If we analyse the situation of recent decades, freedom of religion in Cuba has undoubtedly improved. The constitution now defines the state as secular whereas it had previously defined it as atheist. Thus, we can say that the foundations for coexistence have been laid. There are some guarantees for freedom of worship and the exclusion of Christians from mainstream social structures has diminished significantly.

Although all this is positive, it is not sufficient. The guidelines that govern freedom of religion and worship are imprecise, sometimes contradictory and therefore arbitrary; hence, there is a long and hard road ahead. Cuba's current project of constitutional reform²⁶ could be another step towards freedom of religion as it is being proposed in light of socio-economic changes affecting the lives of people across the country.

Endnotes

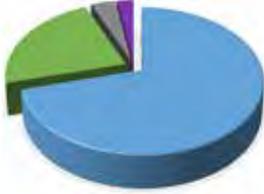
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CYPRUS

RELIGION



- Christians: 70,8%
- Muslims: 22,8%
- Agnostics: 3,8%
- Others: 2,6%



AREA

9.251km²

POPULATION

1.177.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Religious discrimination is prohibited by article 18 of the constitution, which also safeguards the right of individuals to profess their faith, worship, teach and practice or observe their religion, whether individually or collectively, in private or in public. Such rights can only be limited or curtailed on grounds of national security, public health, safety, order, morals, or the protection of civil liberties. The same article of the constitution specifies that all religions are free and equal before the law, so long as their doctrines or rites are not kept secret. Furthermore it safeguards an individual's right to change his or her religion and prohibits the use of any type of coercion to make a person change, or prevent a person from changing, his or her religion.

As set forth in the constitution (article 110) the autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus has sole responsibility for its internal affairs and property in accordance with its canons and charter. The constitution also sets guidelines for the Muslim community: the Vakf, an Islamic Institution manages sites of worship and regulates religious matters for Turkish Cypriots. It also prohibits legislative, executive, or other acts which contravene or interfere with the Orthodox Church or the Vakf. Three other religious groups are constitutionally recognised: Maronite Catholics, Armenian Orthodox and "Latins" (Roman Catholics, mostly of Cypriot origin), granting them tax exemption and allowing them to apply for government subsidies such as running schools in order to to preserve their "cultural identity".¹

The most important mosque in Cyprus, the Hala Sultan Tekke Mosque, is administered by the Department of Antiquities. Turkish Cypriots wishing to visit the Mosque were required to submit their requests to the UN Peace Keeping Force, which then liaises with the government.²

A bill was drafted which would remove all reference to religious affiliation on civil marriage documents; commissioners regarded the requirement to disclose religious beliefs as a violation of religious freedom. At time of writing the bill is still being debated.³

Incidents

Religion and ethnicity can be very closely intertwined in Cyprus making any identification of specific incidents with a clear and unquestionable religious basis highly problematic. However, there were several reports of members of the Jewish community being mocked or assaulted in the streets because of their yarmulkes and long curls.⁴

The Grand Mufti Talip Atalay, a committed advocate of inter-faith dialogue, was arrested for a few days in July 2017, allegedly for his connections to the Fetullah Gülen movement, despite having voiced his opposition to the group's attempted coup attempt on 15th July 2016. An article in the Cyprus Mail suggested that his detention was part of a power struggle between a conciliatory faction and a Turkish nationalist one. The former 'Prime Minister' of Northern Cyprus, Huseyin Ozgurgun, had demanded that president Akinci the removal of the Grand Mufti.⁵ The political situation is very complex. Atalay's attempts to strengthen Islam in the traditionally secularist north have been seen by some as a policy of Islamisation. Atalay argues that this is merely a return to normalisation after an era of anti-religious leftism.⁶

Prospects for freedom of religion

While the religious leaders of Cyprus remain committed to interreligious peace⁷ and frequently unite on questions of human rights, for example taking a stand against violence directed towards girls and women,⁸ religious freedom is at risk because of the increasing political pressure coming from the Turkish government. Liberal Turkish Cypriotes fear a deterioration of the situation, as a less conciliatory Sunni Islam is being imported to the island by Turkish authorities. Some argue that Northern Cyprus might simply become a Turkish province, which could mean an end to the comparatively cordial relations between religions.⁹ The case of Grand Mufti Talip Atalay, noted above, could be a foretaste of this. The future of religious peace rests on a continued dialogue between the different communities.

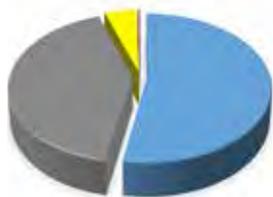
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CZECH REPUBLIC

RELIGION



- Christians: 52,9%
- Agnostics: 41,9%
- Atheists: 4,9%
- Others: 0,3%



AREA	POPULATION
78.868km ²	10.600.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The question of religious freedom is not explicitly addressed in the constitution, but articles 15 and 16 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms guarantee freedom of religious conviction and grant fundamental rights to all citizens regardless of their faith or religion. Under the charter, individuals have the right to practise religion, alone or in community, in private or public, “through worship, teaching, practice, or observance” or to abstain from religious belief and activities. They may also to change their religion. The charter defines religious organisations, recognises their freedom to profess their faith (both publicly and privately) and to oversee their own affairs without undue state interference. According to the charter, religious freedom may be limited by law should there be “public safety and order, health and morals, or the rights and freedoms of others.”¹

The government funds a number of religiously based cultural activities. These include the Night of Churches, the National Pilgrimage of St Wenceslaus, Culture against Anti-Semitism, Prayer for Home, the Apostolic Church’s Kristfest, and the Roman Catholic Church’s Romani Pilgrimage.

Incidents

The Ministry of Interior (MOI) and Federation of Jewish Communities stated that neo-Nazi groups, nationalist groups and Islamic groups, including the Muslim Union, had expressed anti-Semitic views. The MOI noted that groups such as the National Resistance and the Autonomous Nationalists held public gatherings and published blogs that had included anti-Semitic statements, Holocaust denial, the dissemination of neo-Nazi propaganda, and anti-Muslim sentiments.²

According to a report by Al Jazeera, Islamophobia surged in recent years in reaction to the refugee crisis, despite the Muslim community being comparatively small. The report criticises the fact that, although Islam is recognised legally as a religion in the country, it is being denied privileges such as the right to establish schools, hold legally recognised

weddings or conduct religious services in public spaces. Hate-speech against Muslims and even physical attacks have become more common. For example, in July 2017 two Muslim women were assaulted verbally and physically by a woman in a water park in Prague. Some Muslims have already left the country as a result of the situation.³ On a political level, anti-Muslim sentiments have proved immensely popular in Czech society. Parties with hostile positions towards Islam met with success in the October 2016 parliamentary elections.⁴

At the same time, attitudes towards Christianity seem to have changed in the intensely secularist Czech society. There is a notable trend towards more positive evaluations of cultural Christianity, with more people rediscovering their religious roots. It is difficult to estimate how deep this identification goes, since it is often closely connected to vehemently anti-immigration attitudes and indifference to Christian social teachings about abortion, same-sex marriage or divorce.⁵ As an example of this trend, in September 2017 people in the city of Brno staged a protest against the removal of Christian symbols from advertisements showing a church on the Greek island Santorini, in the German supermarket chain Lidl.⁶ The protest spread to other towns such as the small city of Chomutov.⁷

Cardinal Dominik Duka of Prague voiced strong reservations about Muslim immigration, calling instead for a greater support for Christian refugees.⁸ The Church has appealed to the government to ease asylum restrictions for Christians persecuted in China. It criticised a policy of prioritising trade ties over human rights.⁹

In 2016 “NO to Islam in the Czech Republic” renamed itself “Block Against Islam” and, under its new name, organised several anti-Islam rallies. A dozen demonstrations against admitting more Muslim refugees to the country were organised by “Block Against Islam” in conjunction with the opposition Usvit National Coalition political party. Protests in major cities such as Prague, Brno, Ostrava and Pilsen attracted several hundred demonstrators. “Block Against Islam” has also opposed Muslim practices including halal butchery. The group’s leader Dr Martin Konvicka was investigated by authorities after staging a mock Deash (ISIS) attack on Prague city centre in June 2016. Police also broke up a protest Konvicka organised in front of the Saudi Arabian embassy on 11th September 2016.¹⁰

The government vigilantly opposes intolerance. In a newspaper interview on 30th July 2016, Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka stated that “saying every Muslim is a terrorist” was not the way to counter threats.¹¹

On a positive note, in August 2016 a group of approximately 80 Czech Muslims attended Mass at the Catholic Church of the Most Sacred Heart of Our Lord in Prague in memory of the murder of Father Jacques Hamel, killed by Daesh (ISIS) terrorists in France. After the Mass, Muslim representatives spoke about the tenets common to both religions and condemned terrorism. This was followed by the formation of a human chain of about 400 people around the church.¹²

Prospects for freedom of religion

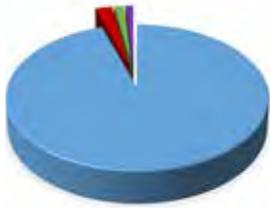
Since the intensification of the refugee crisis in 2015 the situation for the small Muslim minority as well as Muslim visitors has deteriorated. These acts of intolerance are generally punished promptly by the authorities. However, popular opposition to the refugee resettlement programme of the European Union continues to increase and is likely to continue generating tensions. At the same time, attitudes towards the cultural heritage of Christianity improved slightly. For other religious minorities, the situation is neither improving, nor deteriorating.

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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

RELIGION



- Christians: 95,1%
- Ethnoreligionists: 2,4%
- Muslims: 1,4%
- Others: 1,1%



AREA	POPULATION
2.344.858km ²	79.723.000

Legal Framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The 2006 constitution of the Democratic Republic of Congo upholds the secular character of the state and proclaims respect for religious pluralism. Article 13 forbids all forms discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin, religious denomination or opinion.¹

Likewise, article 22 guarantees: "Every person has the right to freedom of thought, of conscience and of religion. Every person has the right to manifest their religion or their convictions, alone or as a group, both in public and in private, by worship, teaching, practices, the observance of rites and the state of religious life, in a manner consistent with respect for the law, public order, morality and the rights of others."²

There is freedom to build churches and raise funds for religious activities from both inside and outside the country. All religious groups have complete freedom to engage in proselytism, including teaching children about religion. Some preachers do so in markets, street junctions and on public buses. Churches are also free to hold religious functions, worship and training. Because of youth gangs called Kulunas, moving at night can be dangerous in Kinshasa and other towns.³ In order to avoid the risk of attack from these gangs, the faithful from different denominations may spend the whole night in their churches, until dawn.

In 1977, the government of the then Republic of Zaire signed the Schools Convention with the Catholic, Protestant, Kimbanguist and Islamic communities.⁴ Religion is taught in school and is part of the official curriculum. A number of religious groups run a wide range of institutions like schools, health centres, orphanages and media outlets. Concerning the media, most TV channels and radio stations in Kinshasa belong to different Christian communities.

Incidents

ACN's Religious Freedom in the World 2016 Report noted that the DRC's authorities and the Bishops' National Episcopal Conference of Congo (known by its French acronym CENCO) had been "on a collision course since 2014" over President Kabila's proposal to

extend his stay in office beyond the two terms permitted in the constitution. A major political crisis erupted in the second half of 2016 after it became clear that scheduled elections were not going to take place, and President Kabila planned to remain in office beyond December 2016.

CENCO helped broker a last-minute accord between the country's major political actors on 31st December 2016 to bring the country out of political deadlock. Known as the St Sylvester Agreement, it stated that President Kabila would not stand for a third term, or try to change the constitution and that elections would be held before the end of 2017. Under its conditions, President Kabila would remain in office during this transitional period, which the High Court had confirmed six months earlier.⁵ However, a lack of commitment to the accord by President Kabila's camp prompted the bishops to withdraw. This soured relations between the Church and the authorities, prompting the Vatican to cancel a scheduled visit to the DRC by Pope Francis in March 2017. The US State Department's March 2017 report "commend[ed] the tireless efforts of the DRC's Council of CENCO in mediating [the St Sylvester Agreement] initiative". Also, the US "strongly supports a continuing role for CENCO in the process, and seconds CENCO's public appeal for both sides to redouble efforts to overcome points of disagreement."⁶

Attacks against Church institutions took place in Kasai – a province that has been caught up in a violent conflict since 2016 – as well as in the capital Kinshasa. On 18th February 2017, the former's Major Seminary was looted by armed men allegedly belonging to a local militia, the Kamwina Nsapu. Father Richard Kitenge Muembo, rector of the seminary, said: "They systematically broke all the doors of the priests' rooms and burnt our belongings." The following day, a group of 12 attackers broke into St Dominic's Church, Kinshasa, and destroyed furniture before desecrating the tabernacle. At the same time, people in Kinshasa found anonymous flyers on the streets calling for the "destruction of Catholic churches and schools" as well as religious communities. Following the events the Archbishop of Kinshasa, Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo, issued a statement claiming that "the Catholic Church is intentionally targeted [in order] to torpedo its mission of peace and reconciliation."⁷ He added: "We learned with indignation of the arson attack on a section of the major seminary in Malole [in Kasai Province] by violent thugs, who have [also] sown terror among the Carmelite Sisters."⁸

One year after the signing of the St Sylvester Accord, the Comité Laïc de Coordination (CLC), DRC's lay coordination committee, called on Catholics to join peaceful demonstrations following Mass on Sunday 31st December 2017 to demand political parties respect the agreement, engage in political dialogue and uphold the constitution.⁹ Security forces responded to the peaceful protests with violence: eight people were killed (seven in Kinshasa and one in Kananga), 92 wounded and 180 arrested. CLC described "violent repression" noting that DRC's authorities did "not hesitate to fire live ammunition at the population... not hesitate to throw tear gas into the churches... constituting a serious violation of the sacred places."

Church leaders also blamed DRC's security forces for attacks over the New Year which took place at 134 churches and chapels in the capital and a number of provinces in the

country. The high number of attacks strongly suggests a deliberate tactical mass-attack by President Kabila's government against the Catholic Church's stance against Kabila's attempt to extend his presidency beyond the constitutional remit. On 3rd January 2018, Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo, issued a strong statement to "denounce and condemn the actions of our so-called valiant men in uniform whose actions are tantamount to barbarism". The Apostolic Nuncio also condemned the "disproportionate reaction by the security forces against the peaceful demonstrations",¹⁰ adding that the CLC "has legal personality within the Catholic Church and can organise initiatives in all the territory of the archdiocese".¹¹

Less than a fortnight later, security forces attacked parishioners holding a procession in the grounds of Kinshasa Cathedral on Friday 12th January. Father Jean Nkongolo asked forces to stop shooting, but as Father Cikongo described: "[A] policeman shot at him directly towards his eyes with a rubber bullet, but thanks be to God Father Nkongolo reacted quickly and moved his head away from the attack. Otherwise he would have been hit in the eyes, but he was shot on the side of his face." Father Cikongo said that after the attack Father Nkongolo noticed a woman shot in the head. "We thought at the time that she was dead but she had survived."¹² The CLC called for peaceful demonstrations in response to the violence. On Sunday, 21st January 2018, security forces killed six people with 49 wounded and 94 arrested, according to MONUSCO, the UN mission in the country.¹³ On that occasion, pro-democracy rallies took place not only in Kinshasa, but in towns like Goma, Bukavu, Kananga and Mbuji-Mayi. In many cases, churches were surrounded by soldiers since early morning.¹⁴

Many witnesses reported that police had closed a number of churches. They used tear gas and live bullets to prevent people coming out of church from joining the protests. In several instances, members of the security forces forcibly stormed Masses, fired inside churches, beat worshippers and forced people out. A Catholic from the St Michel's parish in Bandalungwa district said: "While we were praying, soldiers and policemen shot their way into the church and scattered us. Many people fell to the ground and some paramedics tried to revive elderly ladies who had fainted, but the priest did not stop the Mass".¹⁵

More than a dozen police officers used tear gas and stun grenades against some 300 churchgoers at another church in the working-class district of Barumbu. The parishioners were observed to wave Bibles and sing religious songs as they tried to march.¹⁶ On the following day, Cardinal Monsengwo once again challenged the authorities in a strongly worded message: "Are we in an open-air prison? How can [security forces] kill men, women and children and elderly singing religious anthems?... We want the force of the law to reign and not the law of force". The Cardinal called on Christians to remain firm "without ever yielding to violence".¹⁷

On 10th February 2018, the priests and religious working in the Archdiocese of Kinshasa published a letter addressed to the country's political authorities in which they denounced the violence used during the protests on 31st December and 21st January. They said: "If you feel the obligation to repress with violence the people's right to demonstrate, you should also behold that priests have an obligation to denounce these barbaric acts... Still, be sure of this: you have weapons, but victory shall be God's".¹⁸ The letter ended by denouncing the

acts of brutality suffered by some priests: “We have witnessed a terror never seen before in this city, including a priest stripped naked in public. Priests are often abused, insulted even in state media, brutalised and abducted during the exercise of their pastoral duties”.¹⁹

Around this time, several incidents of intimidation were reported. On 3rd February 2018, police took Father Sebastien Yebo into custody. The authorities picked him up at St Robert’s Church in Kinshasa, as he finished celebrating Mass, and took him to an unknown location. A nun witnessed the assault and abduction. An unidentified man “filmed the priest” on a mobile phone. The religious Sister said: “a police vehicle arrived, the police went down, they started to beat the priest, they threw him into their jeep and left with him.” The following day, Father Yebo was released. He stated that he was questioned about his alleged role in financing the Kamwina Nsapu, the rebel militia operating in Kasai Province.²⁰ Reports state that MONUSCO expressed concern in February 2017 over the ongoing conflict “marked by violent atrocities committed by the Kamwina Nsapu militias” in the Kasai region. That same month, the High Commissioner of Human Rights, Mr Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, said: “It is time to stop a brutal military reaction that does nothing to address the root causes of the conflict between the government and local militias, but instead targets civilians on the basis of their alleged links with the militias”.²¹

The CLC called for a new rally on 25th February 2018 at the end of Sunday Mass. On that occasion, one person was shot dead in Kinshasa and another one in Mbandaka was seriously injured and later died because of his injuries. According to the Congolese Association for Access to Justice, police arrested at least 80 people that day.²²

Catholic priests continued to be targeted in a series of kidnappings. On the night of 16th July 2017, Father Pierre Akilimali and Father Charles Kipasa were abducted by armed men in the Parish of Notre-Dame des Anges de Bunyuka, Beni-Butembo Diocese.²³ As of May 2018, both priests were still missing. Previously in October 2012, three Congolese Assumptionist priests, Fathers Jean-Pierre Ndulani, Anselme Wasikundi and Edmond Bamutut, were abducted in their parish, Notre-Dame des Pauvres de Mbau, about 20 kilometres from the town of Beni. Their whereabouts remain unknown. After the July kidnappings, Archbishop Utembi Tapa of Kisangani called on armed groups not to confuse the Church’s pastoral role with perceived political “interference”.

On 22nd January 2018, unidentified gunmen kidnapped Father Robert Masinda and two agronomists Dieudonne Sangala and Augustin Vyunza, and three others from the parish of Bingo parish working for a Church-run training farm. All of them were released by their captors two days later. Some speculated that the kidnappers might have been soldiers seeking a ransom.²⁴

Another priest, Father Célestin Ngango, from the Parish of Karambi, in Goma Diocese, North Kivu district, was abducted on the 1st April 2018, Easter Sunday, in Nyarukwangara, Rutshuru Territory, on his way back to his parish after celebrating Mass. The following day, his captors demanded a US\$ 50,000 ransom.²⁵ The priest was one of 10 kidnapped within a week, of which three were killed after ransoms were not paid. After an undisclosed ransom was paid, he was released on 5th April.²⁶

Another priest, Father Etienne Nsengiunva, 38, also from Goma Diocese was assassinated on 8th April. He had just finished celebrating Mass in the outstation of Kyahemba and was having lunch with some of the faithful when a gunman stormed into the house and shot him dead.²⁷ The Vicar General of the Diocese of Goma, Father Louis de Gonzague Nzabanita, blames the Mai-Mai Nyatura²⁸ for the murder. The latter are a militia that claims they are fighting for the rights of Kinyarwanda-speaking Hutus of North Kivu. The UN Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) noted the attacks in eastern DRC are “fundamentally rooted in competition over land and natural resources, have resulted in cycles of violence committed along ethnic lines”.

Prospects for freedom of religion

During the reporting period, there was a very sharp increase in the number of attacks targeting the Catholic Church by the authorities in the DRC. In previous years, attacks against Church institutions and personnel were generally by armed militias and gangs of bandits operating in the country's conflict areas, mainly in the east. While that trend continued, a new front of attacks came from the authorities because of the Church's strong role in promoting democracy and human rights, which are values enshrined in the social teaching of the Church. Given the repeated demonstration of violence point to the present political regime's unwillingness to relinquish power and refusal to accept a smooth transition, it can be concluded that the right to religious freedom is very likely to be further undermined in the near future.

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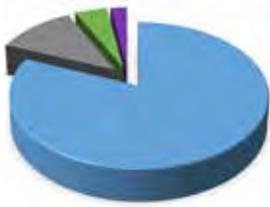
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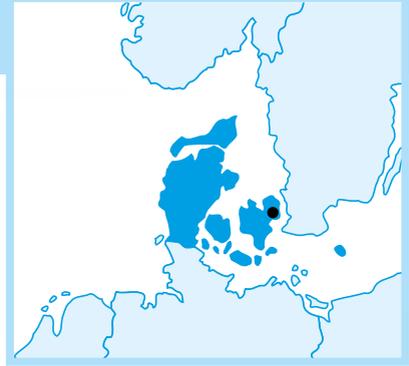
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DENMARK

RELIGION



- Christians: 81,3%
- Agnostics: 11,6%
- Muslims: 4,7%
- Others: 2,4%



AREA	POPULATION
42.921km ²	5.691.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution guarantees the right of individuals to worship according to their beliefs so long as they are not contrary to morals, and do not disturb the public order. Equally, they have the right to form congregations.¹ No one may be deprived of their civil and political rights because of religious beliefs,² and conscientious objectors are exempt from military service.³

The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) is the national Church and is supported by the state. The reigning monarch must also be a member of the Church.⁴ The Ministry of Culture and Ecclesiastical Affairs has officially registered 176 other religious groups, 113 of which are Christian, 30 Muslim, 15 Buddhist, 8 Hindu, and three Jewish communities. While other, unrecognised groups are entitled to engage in religious practices, official registration gives religious groups special rights, including the right to perform marriages and baptisms, provide residence permits for clergy, and tax exemptions.⁵

Religious instruction in Evangelical Lutheran theology is compulsory, as are world religions, life philosophies, and ethics. Parents may however request that their children be exempt. All public and private schools, including religious schools, are publicly funded. Non-compulsory prayer in schools is permitted at the discretion of the schools.⁶

Ritual slaughter practices not preceded by stunning (including halal and kosher practices) are illegal, but halal and kosher food may be imported. Judges are not allowed to wear religious symbols such as headscarves, turbans, large crucifixes, and skullcaps.⁷ A bill drafted by the Ministry of Justice in early 2018 would ban face-coverings in public, including the burqa and niqab.⁸

Circumcision of males is legal so long as it complies with Danish law and is performed by a doctor. However, a citizens' petition was filed in 2018 requesting Parliament ban the procedure. Muslim and Jewish leaders have criticised the proposal.⁹

The Danish Parliament repealed the blasphemy provision in the Danish Penal Code on 10th June 2017. In the months that followed, Blasphemy charges against a man accused

of burning of a Qur'an were dropped by prosecutors.¹⁰ Speech which publicly threatens, insults, or degrades individuals on the basis of their religion or belief remains illegal.¹¹

In December 2016 the Aliens Act was amended to include section 29c which enables the Danish Immigration Service to create a "sanctions list" to prohibit certain religious preachers from entering the country if concern for public order in Denmark requires it.¹² As of December 2017, the list bans 11 preachers, all of whom are Muslim except an American pastor who burnt copies of the Qur'an in 2011.¹³

Incidents

The 2016 Hate Crime Reporting database provides official figures for six unspecified crimes motivated by anti-Christian bias.¹⁴ There were no anti-Christian incidents reported by civil society organizations.¹⁵

According to a July 2016 survey of priests living near housing for asylum seekers and a 2016 report by the Danish Institute for Human Rights, Christian asylum seekers were subjected to harassment and threats because of their conversions from Islam to Christianity.¹⁶

The Hate Crime database provides official figures of 21 unspecified crimes motivated by anti-Semitism.¹⁷ There were five incidents (one attack against property and four threats) reported by civil society organisations.¹⁸

In August 2016, someone threw a brick through the window of a kosher butcher shop in Copenhagen.¹⁹ In September 2016, a Jewish man received threatening messages referring to the Holocaust and a Jewish man working for a youth organisation was insulted with anti-Semitic slurs and threatened.²⁰

In May 2017, a Jewish community leader in Denmark complained about a sermon made by an imam at the Masjid al-Faruq mosque in Copenhagen in which he encouraged attacks on Jews.²¹

The Hate Crime database did not report any anti-Muslim crimes and no incidents were reported by civil society organisations.²²

In August 2016, a Muslim school was vandalised with anti-Islamic epithets and targets painted on several windows. In September 2016, members of an anti-Islamic group vandalised a grave in a Muslim cemetery with a blood-like substance and a pig's head.²³

Prospects for freedom of religion

In the period analysed, there were no other significant incidents nor any negative developments regarding religious freedom in Denmark. If the proposed legislation criminalising circumcision of boys passes, it may have a negative impact on the religious freedom of Muslims and Jews in Denmark.

Endnotes

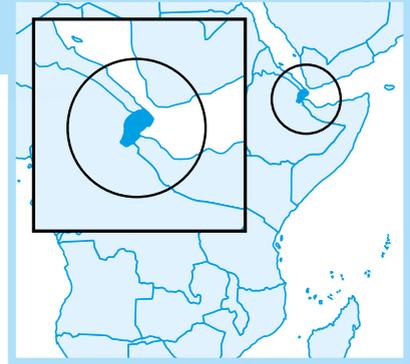
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DJIBOUTI

RELIGION



- Muslims: 97,4%
- Christians: 1,2%
- Agnostics: 1,2%
- Others: 0,2%



AREA

23.200km²

POPULATION

900.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Djiboutian society and Islam are today more closely intertwined from a political-institutional standpoint than under the original constitution in 1992. In the first sentence of Article 1 of the constitution of 1992, Djibouti described itself as a “democratic Republic”.¹ This version was revised in 2010. The preamble now begins with the words “In the name of God All-Powerful”, while Article 1 says: “Islam is the Religion of the State.”²

Some fundamental freedoms are granted to other religions. Under Article 1, all citizens are equal, “without distinction of language, of origin, of race, of sex or of religion”. Under both versions of the constitution, political parties are prohibited from “identify[ing] themselves [with] a race, to an ethnicity, to a sex, to a religion, to a sect, to a language or to a region” (Article 6). Article 11 guarantees for every person “the right to freedom of thought, of conscience, of religion, of worship and of opinion [and] respect for the order established by the law and the regulations”.³ In theory, the constitution does not explicitly prohibit proselytising. Nor do the laws provide for the punishment of those who do not abide by Islamic rules, or who profess another religion.

A law passed in October 2012 gives the Ministry of Islamic Affairs broad powers over the country’s mosques and over the content of public prayers. The ministry’s authority covers all Islamic affairs, from mosques to private denominational schools (over which the Ministry of Education also has jurisdiction) to religious events.⁴ According to statements by government officials, this is intended to prevent political activities in mosque communities, give the government greater controls and limit foreign influence.⁵ In addition to its secular public education system, there are about 40 private Islamic schools in Djibouti.⁶

Implementation of the law, however, has been slow. Fewer than half of all mosques in Djibouti have state-appointed imams in place, as required by law.⁷

Regardless of whether they are from within the country or from abroad, non-Muslim religious groups are required to register with the authorities. Registration applications are followed by a longer review by the Ministry of the Interior. Provisional permissions, pending completion of the review, are not granted. Muslim groups are merely required to notify the Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs of their existence. They are not required

to register, nor are they subject to reviews by the Ministry of the Interior. Foreign groups, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, also need the permission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before they are permitted to operate in Djibouti.⁸

The head of state takes a religious oath of office.⁹

Djibouti's legal codes also contain elements of Islamic law. Islamic courts resolve matters of civil and family law for Muslims. These courts apply Islamic law along with civil law.¹⁰

For non-Muslims, family matters are governed by state civil courts, so civil marriages are permitted to these individuals as well as to foreigners. The government recognises non-Muslim religious marriages if an official document issued by the organisation that performed the marriage can be presented.¹¹

Incidents

While social norms and customs in Djibouti do not provide for the renunciation of Islam, conversions do occur. For instance, it was reported that in the Markazi refugee camp populated by Yemeni refugees a resident who had converted to Christianity was subject to intimidation and insults by his fellow refugees.¹²

According to recurrent reports, converts sometimes face certain consequences such as workplace discrimination.¹³ Representatives of Christian denominations also report acts of vandalism against churches by individuals and destruction of Church property.¹⁴

In some cases, unregistered religious communities, including Ethiopian Protestants and certain Muslim congregations, operate under the auspices of other, registered communities. Smaller communities, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Baha'is, are said to carry out their activities in secret without registering.¹⁵

In recent years, Djibouti has increasingly become a haven for refugees escaping war in Yemen, which is located 20 to 30 kilometres beyond the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb. With its very limited resources, the Catholic Church of Djibouti has provided support for the small number of Catholics from Yemen.¹⁶ The Church also helps in local development, including health care.¹⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

Powerful countries in the world contrast Djibouti's stability with the troubled situation in the surrounding region. However, in Djibouti too many people suffer from a lack of political freedom.¹⁸ The family of incumbent President Ismail Omar Guelleh has been in power since the country gained independence from France in 1977. Guelleh was elected to a fourth term in elections held in April 2016. Opposition candidates have had little scope to upset the status quo. The situation of press freedom in the country is also dire. The organisation Reporters Without Borders strongly criticised the government for arresting BBC journalists and expelling them from the country. Djibouti is near the bottom of that NGO's press freedom index: 170th out of 180.¹⁹ The restrictive and, at times, discriminatory treatment of all non-Islamic religious communities is a clear limit to the latter's ability to profess their faith.

Indications suggest that the government wants to keep the country away from conflicts of any kind, religious ones included. By making the country widely available as an international military base, the government is increasing its revenue. Recognising Djibouti's strategic location on the Gulf of Aden,²⁰ China opened its first military base in the country in July 2017. The terms of the lease permit the stationing of up to 10,000 Chinese soldiers at the site. The US has long been present in Djibouti, with its only permanent military base in Africa situated in the country. France, the former colonial power, and Italy have bases in the country; Germany and Spain have troops in Djibouti.²¹ Saudi Arabia is currently building a military base there as well.²²

Leasing these facilities brings in hundreds of millions of dollars to the treasury of Djibouti each year. There is reason to suggest that Djibouti's international importance as a military base and the resulting income for the country may act as a counterbalance against extremism, thus ensuring freedom of religion at least to some degree.²³

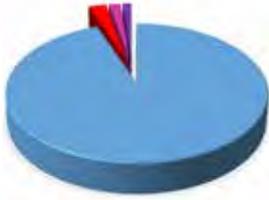
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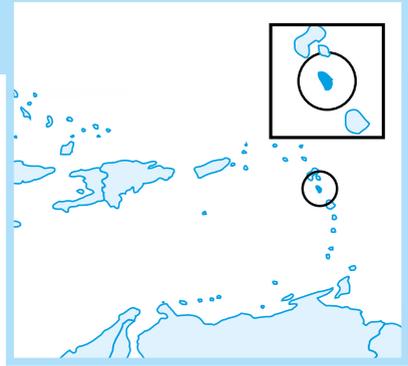
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DOMINICA

RELIGION



- Christians: 94,4%
- Spiritists: 2,6%
- Baha'is: 1,7%
- Others: 1,3%



AREA
750km²

POPULATION
73.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the constitution¹ states that for the people of Dominica the founding principles of the country are the supremacy of God, faith in human rights and fundamental freedoms, the dignity of the human person, and the equal and inalienable rights with which all people are endowed by their Creator.

Dominica upholds the protection of every citizen's human rights and fundamental freedoms. This is subject to each person's respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the public interest. Article 1 of the constitution states that this includes, inter alia, freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association, without distinction of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex.

Conscientious objection to military service is recognised in Article 4 of the constitution.

Article 9 of the constitution declares that no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of their freedom of conscience, which includes freedom of thought and religion, freedom to change one's religion or belief, manifest it and propagate it through worship, teaching, practice and observance, alone or with others, in public or in private. Except with their own consent (or that of their guardian in case of minors under 18 years of age), no person attending a place of education or detained in prison or serving in the Armed Forces shall be required to receive religious instruction or take part or attend any religious ceremony that is not of their own religion.

Article 9 also declares that every religious community has the right to establish and maintain, at their own expense, places of education and shall not be hindered or prevented from providing education and religious instruction to its members, irrespective of whether they receive government subsidies. No person shall be required to take an oath against their beliefs or in a manner that contravenes their religion or beliefs.

Religious organisations can be recognised as non-profit entities provided they request registration from the Ministry of Justice.² Such requests must be signed by five directors of the religious group and give the name and place where religious services will be

celebrated. Places of worship are also subject to registration and can only be used for religious purposes.³

Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost Monday and Christmas are national holidays.⁴

Dominica has a national prayer.⁵

Incidents

In mid-2016, the Pointe Michel Catholic Church, located in the town of the same name, was damaged by arson. The site, which is dedicated to Our Lady of La Salette, is a National Shrine.⁶

In August 2016, a Muslim family, on their way home from a trip to Santa Lucia, was offended by a Dominican official. The latter forced the wife to lift her hijab, to check her identity. When the family asked that a female officer make the identification, they were told none was available. The husband said: “[The Muslim official] wanted to ensure he himself saw her . . . she raised the veil and he wants to see more, wants her to raise it more.”⁷ The head of the Muslim community noted that that this was not the first time Muslims faced this kind of situation at customs but there were concerns that nobody should be exempt from full and comprehensive security checks.

In early 2017, the Dominican Association of Evangelical Churches protested against acts of vandalism and violence that took place during a protest calling for the resignation of the country’s Prime Minister and cabinet.⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

Unlike the previous period (2014-2016), there were reports of intolerance on the part of agents of the state, and attacks against places of worship. This would suggest a decline regarding freedom of religion but it is not sufficient to be categorised as a trend.

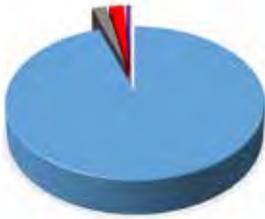
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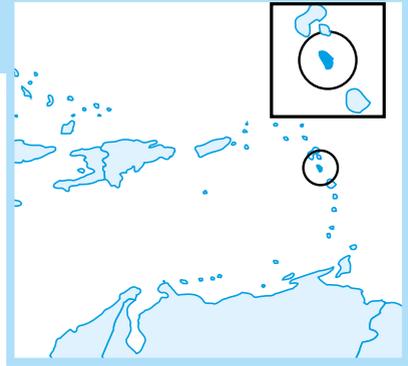
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DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RELIGION



- Christians: 94,9%
- Agnostics: 2,2%
- Spiritists: 2,2%
- Others: 0,7%



AREA	POPULATION
48.671km ²	10.649.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the constitution¹ invokes God and notes that the national emblem includes a Bible and a cross in the centre. The national motto is “God, Homeland and Freedom”

Article 39 states that all people are born free and equal, are entitled to the same protection and treatment and enjoy the same rights, freedoms and opportunities, without discrimination based on, among others, gender, colour, religion or political opinion.

Article 45 upholds freedom of conscience and worship, subject to public order.

Religious marriages shall have – according to article 55 – civil effects in the terms established by law, without prejudice to the provisions of international treaties.

Although, under the constitution, the state is not confessional, a concordat is in place, signed with the Holy See in 1954, which declares that the “Catholic religion [. . .] is the Religion of the Dominican Republic and shall enjoy the rights and prerogatives due to it.”²

The state recognises the international legal personality of the Holy See and of all its religious institutions and associations. It guarantees the Catholic Church the free and full exercise of its spiritual power and jurisdiction and its free and public acts of worship.

The government recognises the civil effects of marriages celebrated in accordance with canon law. It guarantees religious assistance to the members of the armed forces and facilitates religious assistance in schools, hospitals and prisons. The state guarantees the teaching of Catholic religion in public schools, except for students whose parents ask for an exemption.

The constitution states that in order to be recognised by the state and obtain legal recognition, non-Catholic religious organisations must fulfil certain requirements and follow the procedures indicated by the law. Once these requirements have been met, they can enjoy tax exempt status.³

The General Education Law upholds freedom of education; private schools may offer religious and/or moral instruction in accordance with their own pedagogical outlook.⁴

Law No. 198-11 regulates the terms and conditions under which the civil effects of religious marriages celebrated by non-Catholic Churches will be recognised.⁵

In June 2016, a bill⁶ was introduced in order to guarantee and protect freedom of religion. It includes a number of provisions, including the obligation of religious entities and churches to register, a ban on any attempt to undermine public order, respect for other faiths, the right not to be subjected to discrimination because of one's religious beliefs, the right to observe the feast days and day of rest of one's religion and the right of religious entities to obtain state grants.

According to a survey by Latinobarómetro, conducted in early 2018, the number of Catholics has dropped.⁷ In 2013, more than 60 percent of the population said that they belonged to this religion, while in 2017 the figure was down to below 50 percent. For the media, the main causes for the decline are recent cases of murder and abuses committed by members of the clergy. Likewise, appreciation for the Pope as the authoritative figure in the Church has also shrunk, with a positive assessment of six on a 10-point scale.⁸

Incidents

In September 2016, a controversy was sparked by an opinion piece that accused the new head of the General Directorate of Internal Revenue (Dirección General de Impuestos Internos) of being an enemy of the Evangelical community because of the implementation of new procedures for obtaining tax exemptions.⁹ In his response, the new director rejected the charge, described the existing regulations and explained the request for precedents in terms of applying the regulations to recently established churches.¹⁰

In July 2017, transsexual anchorwoman Mía Cepeda was photographed together with presidential candidate Luis Abinader. Bishop Víctor Masalles criticised the photo on social media and was accused of discrimination.¹¹

In October 2017, a court took protective action under the constitution against a Jehovah's Witness couple who had refused to allow a blood transfusion for their new-born daughter. The court ordered the clinic to perform the blood transfusion, citing the constitution and other laws.¹²

Prospects for freedom of religion

Prospects for religious freedom are good. As in the previous period, no incidents of intolerance have been reported. In this sense, the situation has not changed. A certain interest has developed in civil society for scholarly meetings on religion, specifically on religious freedom. Some government authorities have stressed the value of freedom of religion and of non-discrimination in religious matters and have specifically made statements to this effect. For example, the first Caribbean Religious Freedom Symposium¹³ was held in November 2017 at the Mother and Teacher Pontifical Catholic University (Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra), in Santo Domingo, on the topic of 'Religious Freedom and Economic Development'. In the opening speech, Dominican Vice President Margarita Cedeño stressed the importance for legal systems to recognise and guarantee religious freedom.¹⁴ Other examples of the country's pluralist atmosphere include the

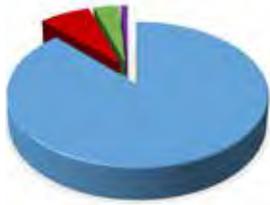
first Symposium on Science and Religion in October 2016 by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹⁵ In June 2017, a meeting was held between the Ministry of Tourism and the (Catholic) Ramón Pané Foundation to coordinate activities to promote religious tourism.¹⁶

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EAST TIMOR

RELIGION



- Christians: 87,9%
- Ethnoreligionists: 7,4%
- Muslims: 3.7%
- Others: 1%



AREA

15.410km²

POPULATION

1.211.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Constitutionally, the basic law of East Timor (Timor-Leste) is modelled on that of Portugal. It guarantees freedom of conscience, religion and worship, and enshrines the principle of separation between Church and state. The preamble of the constitution asserts the state's determination "to fight all forms of tyranny, oppression, social, cultural or religious domination and segregation, to defend national independence, to respect and guarantee human rights and the fundamental rights of the citizen".¹ Article 12 of the constitution stipulates: "The state shall recognise and respect the different religious denominations, which are free in their organisation and in the exercise of their own activities, to take place in due observance of the constitution and the law." It adds: "The state shall promote cooperation with the different religious denominations that contribute to the well-being of the people of East Timor." Article 16 of the constitution also stipulates that no one may be discriminated on the basis, among other things, of their religious affiliation. The country's penal code reflects these constitutional provisions. Article 124, for example, describes as crimes against humanity actions including "persecution, construed as deprivation of the exercise of fundamental rights contrary to international law against a group or a collective entity due to politics, race, nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion".²

However, in a country with one of the highest percentages of Catholics in the world, the preamble to the constitution also states: "In its cultural and humane perspective, the Catholic Church in East Timor has always been able to take on the suffering of all the people with dignity, placing itself on their side in the defence of their most elementary rights."³ Article 11.2 of the constitution states: "The state acknowledges and values the participation of the Catholic Church in the process of national liberation of East Timor."

Relations between different faith communities are generally positive but there have been reports of violence. The US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report for 2016 states: "Leaders of the Catholic Church and longstanding Protestant and Muslim communities reported good cooperation and relationships among religious groups." The report adds: "Some of the more recently arrived religious groups did not enjoy the same strong interfaith relations."

The small number of Muslims who remained in East Timor after Indonesia's withdrawal has steadily declined in recent years. It is not clear whether their emigration to Indonesia is due to hostility to Islam or to the country's poverty and underemployment. The US State Department's religious freedom report cited a few cases where religious minority groups in rural areas described physical threats against their church members and that a Seventh-day Adventists church in Lautem was a regular target of rock throwing. Also, court proceedings have arisen from the alleged "partial destruction in 2015 of a building being constructed by a Protestant group, reportedly at the instigation of a Catholic priest." The US State Department report also cited a few cases in which students were expelled from their schools because of their religious beliefs.⁴

In a country where the Catholic Church is credited with a great deal of political and social influence (out of 14 statutory holidays, nine are Catholic), the concordat signed on 15th August 2015 between East Timor and the Holy See is gradually being implemented. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Secretary of State, who travelled to East Timor to mark the 500th anniversary of the Catholic Church's presence in the country, said the concordat seeks to strengthen "mutual collaboration for the integral development of the people in justice, peace and the common good". The cardinal said that central to the concordat were the values and principles of international law with regard to religious freedom, and the guarantee that the Catholic faith can be professed and practised publicly and freely. The concordat, he added, "also offers space and opportunities for the Catholic Church to act in society, in accordance with its mission of service to the people and in line with constitutional norms and local legislation".⁵

In practice, the concordat sets out the extent to which the Church is free to provide its services, be it spiritual assistance in prisons, hospitals or orphanages, or in operating charities and organising educational activities. For its part, the state allocates subsidies to the Catholic Church. Each of the country's three Catholic dioceses has received government aid worth US\$ 2 million.⁶ In addition, the state budget includes a section dedicated to building and renovating places of worship, including US\$ 9 million that benefits mostly Catholic buildings.⁷

Incidents

In East Timor, cases of religious freedom violations are rare and relatively minor.

Every civil society organisation – including religious bodies – can apply every year for grants from a US\$9 million government fund. According to the US State Department's International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, the head of the Muslim community applied for funding, but without success.⁸ But the report also notes that a Timorese Protestant Church applied for a grant to finance its General Assembly and received US\$ 0,000.⁹

In Parliament, a lawmaker blamed the Jehovah's Witnesses for "buying" conversions, with money. He called for new legislation to control the actions of "new religions". However,

the Prime Minister rejected the demand and stressed that national institutions were committed to respecting religious freedom.¹⁰

Prospects for religious freedom

East Timor is a young state in a region where there are few democratic systems in place. The country has a large proportion of young people and, only achieving independence in 2002, it remains fragile. The presidential elections of March 2017 – the first without United Nations supervision – passed off peacefully and without any notable incident, as did the legislative elections the following July. However, the latter (based on proportional representation with a single-round of voting) did not result in a government majority. Since then, the country has been teetering on the verge of a political crisis. On 26th January 2018, President Francisco Guterres dissolved Parliament after opposition parties, which hold the balance of power, rejected the budget.¹¹ New parliamentary elections are now scheduled. Faced with the potential threat of political instability, the Catholic Church has a role to play in maintaining East Timor's stability. At present, however, nothing appears to threaten freedom of religion in the country.

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RELIGION



- Christians: 95,4%
- Agnostics: 3,2%
- Others: 1,4%



AREA	POPULATION
257.217 km ²	16.385.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble to the constitution states that the people of Ecuador “recognis[e] our age-old roots [...], celebrat[e] the Pacha Mama (Mother Earth) [...] and invoke[e] the name of God and recognis[e] our diverse forms of religion and spirituality.”¹ Under article 1, the country is described as an “inter-cultural, multi-inational and secular state”. The state, according to article 3(4), guarantees “secular ethics as the basis for public service and the legal regulatory system”. Under article 11(2), “no one shall be discriminated against for reasons of cultural identity, [...] religion [or] ideology.”

Under article 66(8), the state recognises and guarantees “the rights of persons [...] to practise, keep, change, [or] profess in public or private one’s religion or beliefs and to disseminate them individually or collectively, with the constraints imposed by respect for the rights of others”. Under the same article, the state also protects “voluntary religious practice as well as the expression of those who profess no religion whatsoever”. Under article 19, “it is forbidden to broadcast advertisements that foment [...] religious or political intolerance.”

Article 57 provides that indigenous communities have “the collective rights [...] to uphold, protect and develop collective knowledge, their science, technologies and ancestral wisdom [...], the right to restore, promote and protect ritual and holy places” and “that the dignity and diversity of their cultures [and] traditions be reflected in public education and in the media.”

Article 66(11) provides for “the right to confidentiality about one’s convictions [including] one’s religious beliefs”. No one is obliged to “make statements about these convictions”.

Under article 28, “public education shall be universal and secular”. Article 29 declares that parents or guardians are free to choose their children’s education in accordance with their beliefs. Under the Code of Children and Adolescents, the state, in article 61, guarantees the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion to children and adolescents. Article 34 guarantees the people’s right to preserve and develop their spiritual, cultural and religious identity and values. The code, in article 52, also prohibits the use of children and adolescents for the purposes of political or religious proselytism.²

In 1937 the Ecuadorian government entered into an agreement with the Holy See in which the Catholic Church is guaranteed the freedom to carry out its ministry and provide education. Catholic dioceses and other institutions are accorded legal recognition.³

Incidents

In June 2017 the Adventist Church held a series of meetings to strengthen the practice of religious freedom.⁴

In November 2017 the first inter-faith music festival was held in Guayaquil. The director of the Guayaquil Symphony Orchestra described the festival as a dialogue involving the choirs of the city's many churches and faiths.⁵

In December of 2017 an inter-faith meeting was held under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Experts from various institutions said inter-faith dialogue was a force for tolerance in society.⁶

In December 2017 a competition for the best Christmas nativity scene was held in Portoviejo. Each entry displayed the distinctive traits of each participating ethnic group. In urban areas, live nativity scenes are also performed with participants wearing indigenous, mestizo and Afro-Ecuadorian garments.⁷

In February 2018 President Moreno met with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ecuador to discuss issues of national concern. Given the secular nature of the state, the meeting suggested that both sides were committed to dialogue.⁸

In January 2018 the Pop Up Café Samborondón Theatre was closed following complaints by Catholic groups about a play titled "The Holy Foreskin", which they viewed as blasphemous and as a mockery of religion. In a statement, the theatre explained that it was never its intention to offend religious sensibilities.⁹

Prospects for freedom of religion

Few significant incidents of intolerance towards religious views have been reported in the period under review. The different faith groups enjoy freedom to express their views. The situation for freedom of religion is good and the outlook for the future is positive.

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EGYPT

RELIGION



- Muslims: 91,1%
- Christians: 8,3%
- Others: 0,6%



AREA	POPULATION
1.002.000km ²	93,384.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Arab Republic of Egypt has a long tradition as a nation state. Although predominantly Muslim, the country is home to the largest Christian community in the Arab world – the Copts. The proportion of Christians is at its highest in the governorates of Upper Egypt. Many Christians also live in Cairo. There is a tiny Jewish minority of a few members.¹ The numbers of Shia Muslims,² Baha'is and other groups are also very small. In recent years Egypt has suffered from political and economic instability and turmoil. In 2011 long-time President Hosni Mubarak was toppled after mass demonstrations. In 2012 Mohammed Morsi, of the Muslim Brotherhood, was elected president by a slim margin. In June and July 2013, the Egyptian military removed him from power following street protests by millions of Egyptians. They accused him of Islamising the country and administering it poorly. Those opposed to Morsi's fall from power and the surrounding events described the development as a coup. Supporters said it was necessary to save democracy. Egypt remains highly divided on the matter. In 2014 General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi was elected president of the country; he was then re-elected in April 2018. But economic and security problems continue. Especially on the Sinai Peninsula, the country is facing an Islamist insurgency by groups allied with Daesh (ISIS). Cairo has also been the scene of attacks against state officials.³

In January 2014 the revised constitution of the state was accepted by referendum.⁴ More than 98 percent of those who voted were in favour of the text. The Catholic Church also welcomed the text. Coptic Catholic Bishop Kyrill William of Assiut told Aid to the Church in Need that the revised constitution's retention of Shari'a law as a source of legislation in Egypt was not necessarily problematic. He said: "This has been the case in Egypt for a long time, even before Morsi. It never did us Christians any harm. But what is more important is that the new article three guarantees Christians and Jews autonomy in matters of civil status and internal Church affairs."⁵

The preamble of the 2014 constitution describes Egypt as: "The cradle of religions and the banner of glory of the revealed religions. On its land, Moses grew up, the light of God appeared, and the message descended on Mount Sinai. On its land, Egyptians welcomed the Virgin Mary and her baby and offered up thousands of martyrs in defence of the Church of Jesus. When the Seal of the Messengers Mohamed (Peace and Blessings Be Upon Him) was sent to

all mankind to perfect the sublime morals, our hearts and minds were opened to the light of Islam. We were the best soldiers on Earth to fight for the cause of God, and we disseminated the message of truth and religious sciences across the world.”

According to article 2, “Islam is the religion of the state and Arabic is its official language. The principles of Islamic Sharia are the principal source of legislation.” The preamble specifies that “the reference for interpretation thereof is the relevant texts in the collected rulings of the Supreme Constitutional Court.” Article three states: “The principles of the laws of Egyptian Christians and Jews are the main source of laws regulating their personal status, religious affairs, and selection of spiritual leaders.”

Article seven protects Al-Azhar University as the most important Sunni institution of Islamic teaching. “Al-Azhar is an independent scientific Islamic institution, with exclusive competence over its own affairs. It is the main authority for religious sciences, and Islamic affairs. It is responsible for preaching Islam and disseminating the religious sciences and the Arabic language in Egypt and the world.”

Article 53 declares: “Citizens are equal before the law, possess equal rights and public duties, and may not be discriminated against on the basis of religion, belief, sex, origin, race, colour, language, disability, social class, political or geographical affiliation, or for any other reason.” Article 64 states: “Freedom of belief is absolute. The freedom of practising religious rituals and establishing places of worship for the followers of revealed religions is a right organised by law.” According to article 74, “No political activity may be exercised or political parties formed on the basis of religion, or discrimination based on sex, origin, sect or geographic location.”

Article 244 states: “The state grants youth, Christians, persons with disability and expatriate Egyptians appropriate representation in the first House of Representatives to be elected after this constitution is adopted, in the manner specified by law.” Under article 98 (f) of the Penal Code, denigrating religions, promoting extremist thoughts with the aim of inciting strife, demeaning any of the “divine religions” and harming national unity carry penalties ranging from six months’ to five years’ imprisonment.⁶

Although religious conversion is not prohibited by law, in practice the government does not recognise conversion from Islam, and Muslim-born citizens who leave Islam for another religion may not change the “religion” entry on their identity cards.⁷ The law does not recognise the Baha’i faith or its religious laws and bans Baha’i institutions and community activities. Baha’is do not have recourse to civil law for personal status matters. The same applies to Jehovah’s Witnesses.⁸

When former Field Marshal Abdel Fattah al-Sisi took his oath of office as Egypt’s new president in June 2014, he paid tribute to the role of the Coptic Church in Egypt both in terms of the past and the present. Reporting on al-Sisi’s speech, Coptic Catholic Bishop Antonios Aziz Mina of Giza, stated: “The new President said the Church has played an important role in Egypt’s history and has made undeniable contributions to safeguard national unity, facing those who fomented conflicts among the Egyptian people. [He] also said that the Church, together with the Sunni University of al-Azhar, can give a valuable contribution to free religious speech from the exploitation it has suffered in recent years.”⁹

EGYPT Incidents

In May 2016 the new text of the law on the construction of places of worship was issued in its pre-definitive form. The draft legislation was delivered to the leaders of the Coptic Orthodox Church, so that they could evaluate the text and raise any objections. In autumn 2014, representatives of the main Churches and Christian communities in Egypt had sent a memorandum to the leaders of the Egyptian government with suggestions and proposals. In particular, they had proposed that permits for the construction of places of Christian worship should be granted by the local municipal authorities, as is the case for the construction of private buildings, rather than being granted only after decisions by provincial or national authorities. The bureaucratic constraints that complicate the construction of new churches date back in part to the Ottoman period. In 1934, the Interior Ministry added the so-called "10 rules", which forbid, among other things, the building of new churches near schools, channels, government buildings, railways and residential areas. In many cases, the strict application of these rules has prevented the building of churches in cities and villages inhabited by Christians, especially in the rural areas of Upper Egypt.¹⁰

On 30th August 2016 the Church Construction and Renovation Law was passed by a majority of two thirds. Under the new law, for the first time in Egypt's history, renovation and construction of new churches will depend on permission from provincial governors. Previously, under rules from Ottoman times,¹¹ presidential permission and the security services' agreement had been necessary.¹² The issue of building or restoring churches in the country has always been, and still is, particularly controversial. Although this new law has improved the situation, it is far from solving the problem, and there have been a few episodes of violent Muslim opposition to Copts arising from the issue.

According to the Catholic News Agency, Egypt has about 2,600 churches – one church for every 5,500 Christian citizens – while there is one mosque for every 620 Muslim citizens.¹³

Copts have taken advantage of this new law to legalise and regularise their places of worship. The Egyptian government has already done this for 215 churches, in seven Egyptian governorates, declaring them compliant with the parameters defined by the new legal provisions.¹⁴ According to Fides, this is only the first step. There are thousands more Christian places of worship that will have to be examined in order to be legalised and regularised.¹⁵

On 30th June 2016 in the Northern Sinitic city of Al-Arish, a Coptic Orthodox priest was shot dead. This attack was claimed by the Egyptian branch of the Islamic State.¹⁶

On 11th December 2016 a suicide bomber himself blew up in the Coptic Orthodox Church of St Peter and St Paul, next to St Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo. At least 29 people, including six children, were killed and dozens were injured. Daesh claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack, stating that the attacks would continue against "every infidel and apostate in Egypt, and everywhere".¹⁷

In February 2017, following the rise of attacks by the Islamic State that targeted Coptic citizens in the Northern Sinitic city of Al-Arish, many families decided to flee to Ismailia, the nearest

city in the Nile Delta.¹⁸ According to official figures, up to 258 Coptic Christian families have left al-Arish city and are now relocated in 13 different governorates.¹⁹

On Palm Sunday, 9th April 2017, there were two suicide attacks in two Coptic Orthodox churches – St George’s in Tanta and St Mark’s in Alexandria – which left 44 people dead and more than 120 wounded. Both attacks were claimed by Daesh.²⁰

On 26th May 2017 at least 28 people were shot dead – several executed with a single shot to the head – and 23 were wounded during a bus trip to the Coptic Orthodox Monastery of St Samuel in Egypt. President al-Sisi repeated his call that countries which finance, train or arm extremists be punished.²¹

Following the April bombings, Egypt imposed a three-month state of emergency. Some voices in the media questioned whether the Copts would continue to trust President al-Sisi, after they had endured these extremist attacks. The Church’s official position has not changed and a majority of the Coptic community still stands with President al-Sisi. One commentator has observed: “While some Copts may question [the Church’s official support for President al-Sisi], like many others who support Sisi they are struggling to see an alternative to the current regime.”²²

Pope Francis made a historic visit to Cairo in January 2017. Father Rafic Greiche, the spokesman for the Egyptian bishops, said: “The Pope’s visit was a big blessing to the Egyptians, both Muslims and Christians. It boosted the morale of the Egyptian people, especially after the Palm Sunday blasts. [The Pope] gave a message of love, peace and hope.”²³

In July 2017 it was reported that, a soldier named Joseph Reda Helmy had been beaten to death after superior officers discovered he was Christian. The official account of the soldier’s death was that he had died of an epileptic seizure. However, an examination of the dead man’s body revealed bruising to his head, shoulders, genitalia, and neck, and also to his back, where the injuries were worst. The three officers suspected of being involved were said to have been taken into custody, after a prosecutor demanded an investigation.²⁴

In January 2018 the Egyptian Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee drafted a response to a memorandum on “Coptic issues” written by the US-based organisation Coptic Solidarity.²⁵ The memorandum, which had been made public by some members of the US congress, alleged systematic discrimination against Copts under al-Sisi’s administration. The Foreign Affairs Committee’s response denied the accuracy of these allegations.

Several cases of inter-faith violence and attacks, abduction, forced conversions and marriages have been reported since the start of 2018.²⁶

In May 2018, the bodies of the 20 Coptic Christians killed by the Islamic State in Libya in February 2015 were returned to Egypt.²⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

The situation concerning religious freedom has improved since an upsurge of anti-Christian violence peaked in August 2013 with attacks on nearly 80 churches and other Coptic centres, including convents, schools and clinics. Father Rafic Greiche, the spokesperson for the Catholic Church, emphasised that the position of Christians in Egypt has improved vastly since Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood was ousted from the Presidency in July 2013. In May 2016, Father Greiche said: "There is no comparison between the situation today and that during the government of the Muslim Brotherhood. Today, we have very good relations between Church leaders and government agencies. However, there are still many problems, of course. But it is my impression that Muslims are growing more aware of our situation."²⁸

President al-Sisi is giving signs which encourage the possibility of greater national unity between Muslims and Christians. His visits to Coptic Christmas services in recent years are testimony to this. Also, the President's call for a reform of Islam has had a positive influence on public opinion. The new constitution of 2014 is a step in the right direction, but other laws and government policies discriminating against non-Muslims remain unchanged. A deeply rooted social intolerance of and discrimination against non-Muslims, especially Christians, remains a serious societal problem, particularly in Upper Egypt. Christians are often victims of crimes such as blackmail and kidnapping, which are encouraged by a climate of impunity. Moreover, those who are altogether outside the traditional monotheistic religions, such as atheists and Baha'is, face daunting challenges in the form of societal attitudes and governmental policies.

There are signs of a change of approach in institutions such as the Sunni Al-Azhar University. But a lot still has to be done. Coptic Catholic Bishop Youssef Aboul-Kheir told Aid to the Church in Need: "The Al-Azhar University is regarded as a moderate force. But in fact there are many things in its teachings and programmes which are anything but moderate. For example, the use of force in cases of apostasy by Muslims is justified. This is in contradiction to moderate views. The Al-Azhar University must correct its programme."²⁹

Although most Copts support President al-Sisi for his efforts to restore security and stability, some of them, especially young urban politicised Copts, tend to criticise the strong links between the Orthodox Coptic Church and the regime.³⁰

Endnotes

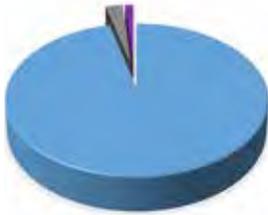
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EL SALVADOR

RELIGION



- Christians: 96,2%
- Agnostics: 2,6%
- Others: 1,2%



AREA

21.041km²

POPULATION

6.146.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the constitution¹ clearly declares trust in God, respect for the dignity of the human person and exhorts freedom and justice.

All persons are equal before the law. The constitution bans discrimination on religious grounds. Article 3 guarantees the exercise of civil rights without restrictions regarding nationality, race, sex or religion. With respect to freedom of expression, article 6 prohibits media companies from discriminating on the basis of the political or religious content of what is published. In relation to the right of association, article 7 bans armed groups based on political, religious or guild grounds. As regards the workplace, article 38 bans discrimination based on creed. Finally, article 47 guarantees the right of association of employers and workers, without distinction of creed.

The constitution guarantees in article 25: “the free exercise of all religions, without other restrictions than those required by the moral and the public order [. . .]. No religious act shall serve as evidence of the civil status of persons.”

The legal status of the Catholic Church is recognised. Article 26 states that other Churches may obtain recognition of their status in accordance with the law.

With respect to the regulation of freedom of worship, the constitution guarantees in article 29 that religious meetings or associations cannot be suspended even under emergency conditions. According to article 82, clergy cannot belong to political parties nor run for office. Article 108 states that no civil or ecclesiastical corporation or foundation can own or administer real estate assets, except for those that are immediately and directly used to serve or fulfil the institution’s mission. Places of worship are exempt from real estate taxes, as stipulated in article 231.

In relation to education, article 54 of the constitution guarantees the right to establish private schools, including schools run by religious groups. Article 55 gives parents the right to choose their children’s education. Article 58 states that no educational establishment may refuse to enrol students on the basis of the marital status of their parents or any social, religious, racial or political differences.

According to the Law on Educational Centres, the educational function of the Catholic Church is of great importance because of its contribution to the educational policies of the state. For this reason, the law recognises the organisation of the educational centres that depend on the Church and allows them to enhance the study plans of the schools under its jurisdiction, in accordance with its principles.²

The Ministry of the Interior has the authority to register, regulate and supervise the finances of non-governmental organisations, non-Catholic Churches and other religious groups. The law exempts the Catholic Church from the obligation of registering, since it is constitutionally recognised. Foreign religious groups must obtain a special residence visa to engage in religious activities and cannot proselytise if their members are in the country on tourist visas.³

31st October was declared the National Day of the Salvadoran Evangelical Church.⁴

Incidents

As observed in the previous period under review, there is no religious dimension to the country's climate of violence. No incidents have been reported undermining the right to freedom of religion.

In October 2017 a group of lawmakers proposed a constitutional amendment to change article 26 in order to grant recognition of legal status to all Christian groups, thus upholding the right to equality and non-discrimination.⁵ In October 2017 the speaker of the Legislative Assembly gave the go ahead to a bill to reform the constitution in order to grant Evangelical Churches the same legal recognition and legal status as the Catholic Church. The initiative was presented by the Reverend Juan Carlos Hasbún and was supported by lawmakers from the GANA political party.⁶

In March 2018 Pope Francis approved the canonisation of Archbishop Óscar Romero of San Salvador. He was murdered in 1980 as he celebrated Mass.⁷ In a statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the government expressed its joy at the announcement.⁸ The canonisation was due to take place on 14th October 2018.⁹

The government – both at local and national levels – has repeatedly called on the Church to play an active role in conflict resolution.

Here are some examples:

In November 2017 the Archbishop of San Salvador expressed concerns about violence in the country and called on government to take act quickly to improve security.¹⁰

In January 2018 the Catholic Bishops' Conference of El Salvador issued a message calling on candidates in upcoming parliamentary and mayoral elections not to ignore the country's problem with violence, especially the large number of murders.¹¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

For several years, the country has experienced gang-related violence and forced displacement. The level is so worrying that governments at different levels have called on the Churches to take part in discussions, mediation and solutions to this phenomenon.

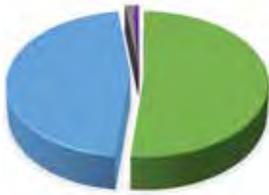
During the period under review, nothing indicates any improvement or deterioration in the status of freedom of religion. Nevertheless, religious groups have played a greater role in seeking solutions to the problem of violence.

Endnotes

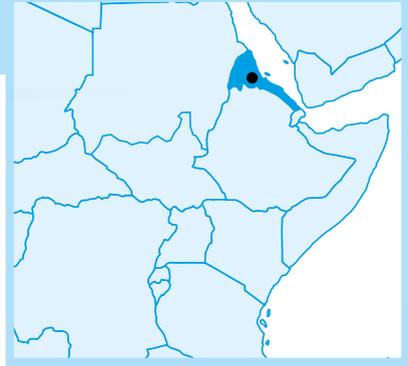
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ERITREA

RELIGION



- Muslims: 51,6%
- Christians: 46,4%
- Agnostics: 1,3%
- Others: 0,7%



AREA

117.600km²

POPULATION

5.352.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In 1997, four years after independence, Eritrea's National Assembly approved the country's constitution. Article 19 states: "Every person shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and belief." It further adds: "Every person shall have the freedom to practice any religion and to manifest such practice."¹ The constitution as such has never been implemented, however, and the authorities have always governed by decrees. In one of them, issued in 1995, the government indicated that just four religious communities were to be recognised by the state – the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea, the Catholic Church, and Sunni Islam.²

For the last few years, the government has controlled the leadership of the Orthodox Church and the Muslim community. The ruling party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), appoints the top leadership of the Muslim community and the Orthodox Church. The government also pays the salaries of top Church officials and controls their means of transport, including fuel rations, as well as their activities and financial resources. By contrast, the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church have maintained a certain degree of autonomy.

According to the US Report on Religious Freedom,³ the country's four authorised religious communities still require permission from the Office of Religious Affairs to print and distribute religious literature among their faithful. Religious leaders and religious media are not allowed to comment on political matters. They are also required to submit reports about their activities to the government every six months. In order to assert authority and present regular reminders, every year the Office of Religious Affairs reiterates the provision contained in the decree of 1995 with regard to religious organisations. It instructs the four recognised religions to cease accepting funds from abroad, to operate based on financial self-sufficiency and to limit their activities to religious worship only. The decree further states that if the Churches wish to engage in social works, they must register as NGOs and concede the supervision of their funding from abroad to the authorities. In practice, however, these prohibitions are not enforced or observed but only increase the precarious situation of the Churches.

Apart from the four officially recognised religions, the other main faith groups are Pentecostal Christians, Evangelicals and Jehovah's Witnesses. These were tolerated until 2002, but since then a decree came into force requiring their governing bodies to submit requests for registration with detailed information about their leaders. The authorities warned them that if they failed to comply they would be declared illegal. The procedure is complex and opened the door to harassment toward the affected groups.

Incidents

Because of the above mentioned restrictions, it is particularly difficult to find information about the current situation of religious freedom in Eritrea. In January 2018, however, the US State Department listed Eritrea as one of its "Countries of Particular Concern" because of severe violations of religious freedom.⁴

The Jehovah's Witnesses continued to be targeted because of their refusal to take part in compulsory military service. It is difficult to know exactly how many followers of this religious denomination remain in detention since the authorities do not allow outside human rights monitors into the country and reliable sources of information from within the country are rare. Jehovah's Witnesses were collectively stripped of their citizenship in 1994 after they refused to participate in the country's 1993 independence referendum. Because of this policy, the government has refused to grant them official documents such as passports, identity papers (which are needed to work) and exit visas.⁵ A form of identification is now compulsory in order to use computers at internet cafes.

The government has sometimes granted visas to Catholic dioceses, allowing them to host visiting clergy from Rome or other foreign locations. Members of the Catholic clergy were permitted to travel abroad for religious purposes and training, although not in numbers that Church officials consider adequate. Seminarians who have not completed their national military service – which can last 10 or more years – have been denied passports or exit visas to pursue their theological training abroad.

On 31st October 2017, scores of students from the al Dīaa Islamic school⁶ in the capital, Asmara, which had been closed by the authorities, demonstrated in front of the President's Office. Previously, on 27th October, the principal of the school, Haji Musa Mohammed Nur, a respected Muslim leader in his nineties, was arrested together with some of the school teachers as part of a series of measures by the authorities aimed at taking control of a number of religious schools, both Muslim and Orthodox.⁷ The security forces reportedly used live bullets to disperse the demonstrators and a curfew was imposed on that same day. A number of students were arrested.⁸ Following this protest, the government increased the presence of soldiers outside mosques throughout the country.

Prospects for freedom of religion

That the government has pursued the same policy of tight control over religious institutions and curtailed their activities shows that little has changed in the last few years. As

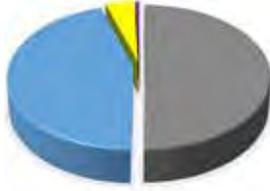
far as religious freedom is concerned, nothing suggests that any positive changes may occur in Eritrea in the near future.

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ESTONIA

RELIGION



- Agnostics: 50,2%
- Christians: 44,9%
- Atheists: 4,3%
- Others: 0,6%



ESTONIA

AREA	POPULATION
45.227km ²	1.309.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution establishes separation between Church and state. Article 40 declares that individuals are free to belong to any religious group and practise any religion, on their own and with others, publicly or privately, except if it is “detrimental to public order, health or morals”.¹ Article 12 bans inciting religious hatred, violence or discrimination. According to article 124, conscientious objectors have the constitutional right to refuse military service on religious grounds but are required by law to perform an alternative service.

The 2002 Churches and Congregations Act² regulates the activities of religious associations and societies. Religious associations are defined as “churches, congregations, associations of congregations and monasteries”. Religious societies are defined as “voluntary associations” whose main activities are religious or ecumenical in nature relating to “morals, ethics, education, culture, confessional or ecumenical, diaconal and social rehabilitation outside the traditional forms of religious rites of a Church or congregation and which need not be connected with a specific church association of congregations or congregation”.

Religious associations have to register at the Tartu County Court.³ Churches, congregations and associations of congregations are obliged to set up their own management board whose members must be Estonian nationals or legal residents. Monasteries need a superior (elected or appointed).⁴ To petition for formal registration, a religious association needs a minimum of 12 members. Management board members must sign and notarise the application for registration, which must also contain the minutes of its constitutive meeting as well as a copy of the association’s statutes. Registration by religious associations falls under the Non-profit Associations Act. This gives registered religious associations certain tax breaks, such as exemption from value-added tax. In all, about 550 religious associations are registered with the authorities.⁵ Unregistered religious associations can conduct religious activities but cannot act as legal bodies.⁶

Religious societies also come under the Non-profit Associations Act. In common with religious associations, they too enjoy certain tax advantages. To register under the aforementioned Act, the founders of a religious society must draft a constitutive contract and statutes and submit their electronic or paper application to the business registry.⁷

According to the International Religious Freedom Report for 2016,⁸ the Estonian government funded the Estonian Council of Churches, a 10-Church body that includes the Lutheran Church and the country's two Orthodox Churches. The authorities played no role in allocating the funds. Some of the money went to individual Churches, some was used in ecumenical projects, and some was invested in training Church officials to operate in civil society. The government consulted representatives of Estonia's Muslim community as well as the Council of Churches in drafting refugee and immigration legislation.

In January 2018 the government decided to pay compensation to the Churches that suffered during World War II. The Estonian Lutheran Church is to receive EUR€6.8 million while the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church will get EUR€1.4 million. In exchange for the money, they will renounce all further claims to restitution. The Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate criticised the decision and will not receive any compensation despite its wartime suffering.⁹

Incidents

According to a report by TIME magazine, Estonia, unlike other countries, saw no large-scale anti-Muslim backlash connected to the refugee crisis.¹⁰ The government remains one of the most eager to implement the European Union's refugee relocation plan. Attitudes within the population could be described as mostly indifferent. Yet the report notes that this might change in the future as a result of the refugees' overwhelming dissatisfaction with the relocation plan itself. Many refugees would rather risk travelling to Germany, as they initially intended to, than integrate into a society they did not choose. Their criticism includes the lack of suitable religious facilities, such as mosques, and halal food. The report suggests that in the future the attitude of the local Estonian population might change in a negative direction as a result of an apparent ungratefulness on the part of refugees who receive the same benefits as the locals.

Some local media, such as the newspaper *Eesti Päevaleht*, have reported more anti-Muslim hostility than in previous years, but it is hard to determine whether it is solely based on religious identity since religion and ethnicity often overlap.¹¹

Meanwhile, the "Soldiers of Odin", a far-right organisation that originated in Finland, has gained some popularity in Estonia. Its members have taken to patrolling the streets to monitor refugee movements. Muslims are explicitly excluded as recruits. Hannes Hanso, Estonia's Minister of Defence, has spoken out against vigilante groups with questionable aims.¹²

The Conservative People's Party of Estonia, which currently holds seven seats in Parliament, advocates certain measures directed against Muslims, Jews and Orthodox Christians, including a ban on new mosques and Eastern Orthodox churches. One of its members, Georg Kirsberg, said he wanted to decriminalise Holocaust denial and "a correct teaching of the history of the Third Reich". The party leader said that such an opinion was not party policy.¹³

Despite this, anti-Semitic incidents remain very rare in Estonia. Members of the Jewish community have stated that they feel very secure and are treated with warmth.¹⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

As in previous years, the situation in Estonia remains very stable, with little to no incidents of religious violence. For most religious groups there was no notable change. However, as the refugee crisis intensifies, it is possible that society's attitudes towards Muslims might worsen. So far, most Estonians have been largely indifferent towards refugees. Some Lutheran congregations (Harju Risti and Talinn Bethel) have helped refugee families find accommodation.¹⁵

Endnotes

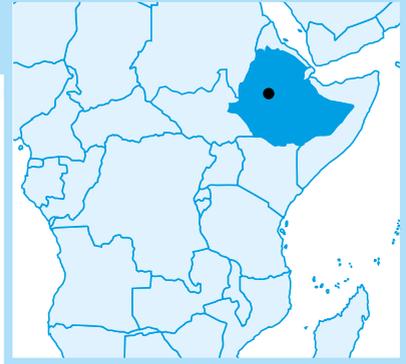
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ETHIOPIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 59,2%
- Muslims: 34,4%
- Ethnoreligionists: 6,3%
- Others: 0,1%



AREA	POPULATION
1.104.300 km ²	101.853.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution of Ethiopia of 1993 enshrines, in article 11, the principle of separation between the state and religion. It further adds that no religion shall be considered as official and that the state shall not interfere in religious matters nor will any religious denomination interfere in state affairs. Article 27 acknowledges the freedom of conscience and religion of all Ethiopian citizens, including the freedom, “either individually or in community with others, in public or in private, to manifest one’s religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching” (section 1). The constitution also asserts the individual’s right to disseminate their beliefs and to convert to another faith, as well as the right of parents to educate their children in the religion they practise.¹

The preamble of the constitution expresses the conviction that the “even development of the various cultures and religions” is one of the indispensable conditions to “ensure a lasting peace, an irreversible and thriving democracy and an accelerated economic and social development for our country, Ethiopia”.

The constitution prohibits religious teaching in all schools, both public and private. Article 90, section 2, states: “Education shall be provided in a manner which is, in all respects, free from religion, [as well as] political or cultural influences.” Religious instruction is permitted in churches and mosques.

The law prohibits the formation of political parties based on religion.

Under a law introduced in February 2009 called the Charities and Societies Proclamation, all Churches and religious groups are considered “charity organisations”, and, as such, are required, in order to be recognised as a juridical body, to submit a request for registration with the Ministry of Justice. They must renew this application every three years. In the absence of such registration, they cannot engage in activities such as opening a bank account or obtaining legal representation. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) are exempt from this three-yearly renewal process. Churches and other agencies specialising in charitable and development work are required to register with the Charities and Societies Agency, separately from

the religious body to which they belong, and are thus subject to existing legislation on NGOs. There is a limit of 10 percent on funding received from abroad.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which is the largest single religious denomination, is particularly dominant in the Tigray and Amhara regions and in some parts of Oromia. Meanwhile Sunni Muslims, who represent about a third of all Ethiopians, are dominant in the Oromia, Somali and Afar regions. Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians represent around 9 percent of the population and are most strongly concentrated in the south-west.²

A 2008 law makes it a criminal offence to incite hostility between religions by means of the media, as well as to engage in blasphemy and the defamation of religious leaders. Various government and civil society initiatives have sought to promote harmonious coexistence between religions and to prevent and solve conflicts related to religion. The government has created the National Interfaith Peace Council, which works with regional governments to foster religious coexistence.

The government does not grant permanent visas to foreign religious workers unless they are involved in development projects managed by registered NGOs affiliated to the Church to which they belong. This policy is not normally applied in the case of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Since the Catholic Church is considered a charity, foreign religious personnel are not allowed to retire in Ethiopia and usually continue to work beyond the age of 65. At the start of 2018, the authorities stopped renewing work permits for anyone over 65. As a consequence, there are serious concerns about the fate of 37 elderly foreign priests and religious who, in theory, have been staying illegally in the country. Although similar situations have always been solved successfully in the past, some sources in the Catholic Church have expressed uneasiness about what they see as a lack of a clear policy regarding this issue.³

The government officially recognises both Christian and Muslim holy days and mandates a two-hour lunch break for Muslims to go to the mosque for Friday prayer. Official holidays include: Christmas, Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter, Meskel, Eid al-Adha, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Eid al-Fitr.

Incidents

During the reporting period, no serious limitations to the right to freedom of religion were recorded. However, Islamic groups have often claimed that the government's 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP) is discriminatory and interferes with their religious practice. They back their claim by citing alleged cases of harassment by security forces. Many observers within the country are inclined to think that such measures flow from state policies designed to control Islamic extremism rather than by a desire to target the practice of Islam as such.

On 23rd January 2018 several people died after clashes broke out between security forces and worshippers taking part in an Orthodox religious ceremony marking the Baptism of Jesus Christ (known as the Feast of Timket), in the town of Woldiya, 500 kilometres north

of the capital Addis Ababa.⁴ It was reported that during the procession scores of young people started shouting slogans against the government. According to official accounts, when soldiers opened fire, violence ensued and seven people died. Other sources stated that the death toll was much higher – up to 35. Local sources indicated that the incident had no religious connotations. Instead they suggested that it was the result of local opposition – mostly from the ethnic Ahmara population – to the government, which is perceived as being dominated by Tigrayans. Similar clashes also occurred in December 2017 in the same region but were not connected to any religious ceremony.⁵

Prospects for freedom of religion

The situation has remained stable during the reporting period with regard to issues pertaining to religious freedom. No incidents of particular concern have been reported. Generally, religious groups carry out their activities without major restrictions, although some minority groups have complained of what they perceive as discriminatory treatment. The detention of Islamic militants and the control the state exerts on Muslim communities seem to be motivated by legitimate security concerns rather than by a desire to curtail religious activities. This attitude of respect for religious freedom seems likely to continue, at least for the next few years.

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RELIGION



- Christians: 64%
- Hindus: 27,6%
- Muslims: 6,2%
- Agnostics: 1%
- Others: 1,2%



AREA	POPULATION
18.272km ²	898.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In Fiji, religious belief is closely linked with ethnic identity. Figures from the 2007 census show that the majority of indigenous citizens are Christians, while the majority of Fijians of Asian descent are either Hindu or Muslim. Around a third of the population are Methodists.

Under the constitution of 2013, religion and the state are separate and freedom of religion is a founding principle of the secular state. The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion and incitement to religious hatred has been criminalised. Under the constitution, "no person shall assert any religious belief as a legal reason to disregard this Constitution or any other law".¹

Religious instruction is not required by law, but religious groups may establish their own places of education provided that they maintain any standard prescribed by law. Property is held by religious groups through trustees, after registration with the government.

The principle of religious freedom is generally respected in practice.

Incidents

The Prime Minister has consistently accused the Methodist Church of being a campaigning organ for the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), and the Church has expressed its disappointment at such comments.² In August 2017, the Methodist Church stated that it wanted all heads at its schools to be Methodists. In response, the Permanent Secretary for Education stated that this was not constitutionally possible.³

In September 2016, the Parliament suspended an opposition lawmaker who had allegedly incited racial antagonism towards the country's Muslim minority. In December 2017, the former Acting Director of Public Prosecutions questioned whether appropriate action was being taken against people who were inciting antagonism on social media against Muslims in Fiji.⁴

A trial of three staff members of the Fiji Times newspaper was set for June 2018.⁵ They are charged with inciting communal antagonism towards Muslims in Fiji by publishing a letter

which contained the following statements: “Muslims are not the owners of this country. These are people that have invaded other nations [...] where they killed and raped their women and abused their children.”⁶ The accused have entered not guilty pleas.

There is a recent history of attacks on Hindu property. On 16th December 2017, the Votua-levu Tirath Dham Hindu Temple in the Nadi area was desecrated. Paint was poured over images, and there were other various acts of theft and vandalism. The Attorney-General said such acts would not be condoned.⁷

The Prime Minister, Voreqe Bainimarama, has continued to emphasise the bonds that unite all Fijians, whatever their religion. For instance, in a speech to the Canadian Society of Fijian Muslims, in April 2017, he observed: “Fiji Day is our chance to reflect on the ties that connect us as members of the same extended Fijian family. Let us all remember that those ties are not defined by our ethnicity, our religion, our gender or our status in society, but rather they are defined by the love we share for our great country.”⁸ At Easter 2017, the former Leader of the Opposition, Ro Teimumu Kepa, defended religious freedom as an “absolute, fundamental human right”⁹

The government has issued a \$2 banknote bearing the image of a Sikh man and this has been seen as a recognition of the contribution that Sikhs have made to the country.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Religion, ethnicity and politics are closely intertwined in Fijian society and it is sometimes difficult to isolate the religious and cultural elements in discriminatory incidents. In the not too distant past, there have been discriminatory laws and policies in Fiji against ethnic Indians, as well as cultural tensions within society. Now society appears to have largely moved on from these problems. Despite periodic incidents, the principle of religious freedom is regularly articulated in the public sphere in Fiji. There is little to indicate change in the immediate future.

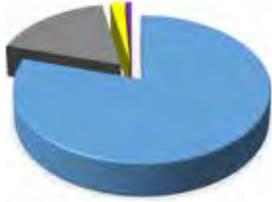
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FINLAND

RELIGION



- Christians: 79,7%
- Agnostics: 17,4%
- Atheists: 2%
- Others: 0,9%



AREA

338.440km²

POPULATION

5.524.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion and conscience, which includes the right to profess and practise a religion, to express one's beliefs and to belong to – or not belong – to a religious community.¹ It prohibits discrimination based on religion.² Complaints of discrimination can be made to the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman.³

The Criminal Code of Finland prohibits "breach of the sanctity of religion", including blasphemy.⁴

The Freedom of Religion Act governs recognition of religious communities and recognised communities are eligible for public funds. Registered religious communities include the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELC), the Orthodox Church of Finland, and other communities such as the Catholic Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Evangelical Free Church, and the Seventh-Day Adventists. Religion can be practised without registration with the government.⁵

The ELC has a special status as an institution under public law.⁶ Members of the ELC or Orthodox Church must pay a church tax or formally terminate their memberships. The ELC and Orthodox Church must maintain cemeteries and may register births, marriages, and deaths for the state.⁷

Students belonging to a recognised religious community are given religious education in accordance with their religions, while others are taught ethics. The singing of traditional hymns at school celebrations and at Christmas is not considered the practice of religion and is therefore permitted to preserve Finnish culture. There are a small number of private religious schools.⁸

There are legal restrictions on animal slaughter, but the law allows some religious slaughter, provided the animals are killed and stunned simultaneously. Leaders of the Muslim and Jewish communities continue to oppose restrictions.⁹

While circumcision of boys is legal, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health guidelines discourage it and the government does not fund the procedure. The guidelines state that the procedure should only be performed by physicians, that the child's parents be advised

of risks, and that it should not be performed on boys old enough to understand without their consent. Jewish and Muslim communities have disagreed with the guidelines and talks with the government continued.¹⁰

Conscientious objection to military service for religious reasons is permitted, provided that objectors complete alternative civilian service. Failure to serve can result in imprisonment. Only Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from both military and civilian service.¹¹

Incidents

With respect to reports of incidents relating to religious minorities, it should be noted that, because ethnicity and religion are often closely linked, it might be difficult to determine whether an incident is motivated by racism, xenophobia, or religious intolerance.

The 2016 Hate Crime Reporting database provides official figures for 29 crimes motivated by anti-Christian bias (14 physical assaults, 12 threats/threatening behaviour, two incidents of damage to property, and one unspecified).¹²

The TempPELLIAUKIO Church in the centre of Helsinki was the target of a foiled terrorist attack in June 2017. As a result, concrete barriers were erected to protect the church.¹³

The Hate Crime database provides official figures of 10 crimes motivated by anti-Semitism (1 physical assault, 6 threats/threatening behaviour, and 3 damage to property).¹⁴

In November 2017 a Finnish court disbanded the Nordic Resistance Movement (PVL), a group linked to violent racist activities, and ruled that it was not entitled to freedom of speech protections because of its actions.¹⁵ The PVL had made statements on its homepage supporting religiously-motivated violence and posted a Holocaust denial story.¹⁶

The Jewish Community of Helsinki launched a campaign to raise €15,000 in 48 hours in November 2017 to finance its security needs, which are €200,000 annually.¹⁷

According to the Hate Crime database, 67 crimes were motivated by anti-Muslim bias (18 physical assaults, 42 threats/threatening behaviour, 4 incidents of damage to property, and 3 unspecified).¹⁸

Members of Suomi Ensín (Finland First) demonstrated against an Eid celebration at a mall in Helsinki in July 2016. Counter-demonstrators overwhelmed the protest with shouts of 'no to racism'.¹⁹

In November 2016, the former chairman of the Finns Party Youth wing was charged with ethnic agitation and breach of the sanctity of religion for a series of anti-Muslim posts on Facebook.²⁰ Several other Finns Party officials were also convicted of offenses relating to anti-Muslim incitement.²¹

Plans to build a 'Grand Mosque' in Helsinki were put on hold in December 2017 after the city's Urban Development Board rejected the bid for land. As a result, the developers withdrew the project for consideration by the city council. The project had been contro-

versial from the beginning, with concerns about funding by Bahrain's Islamic Foundation and whether it would be run by Finnish Muslims or foreign imams.²²

Prospects for free

It appears that there were no significant new or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period under review. However, there appears to be an increased risk of societal intolerance against minority religions fuelled by anti-immigration sentiments in Finland.

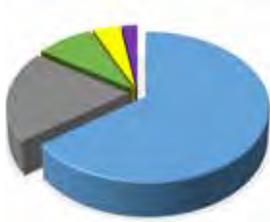
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FRANCE

RELIGION



- Christians: 64,7%
- Agnostics: 19,9%
- Muslims: 8,8%
- Atheists: 4,2%
- Others: 2,4%



AREA	POPULATION
551.500 km	64.668.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution of France (of 4th October 1958) establishes the country as a secular state: "Article 1: France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion. It shall respect all beliefs."¹

The 9th December 1905 Law regarding the separation of state and religions is the cornerstone of the French principle of *laïcité*. Article 1 reads: "The Republic ensures the liberty of conscience. It guarantees the free exercise of religion, under restrictions prescribed by the interest in public order." Article 2 asserts: "The Republic does not recognise, remunerate, or subsidise any religious denomination."²

Prior to this law, all religious buildings were nationalised but were put at the disposal of their former owners for their spiritual needs. Since 1905, the state has been responsible for their maintenance at its own expense. Despite the separation between the state and religions, the government may provide religious groups with loan guarantees or leased properties at discounted rates, and places of worship may be exempt from property taxes.³

State schools are secular. By law, the government can subsidise private schools which implement the official curriculum and accept all children regardless of their religious affiliation. They are known as "schools under contract"; they are mainly Catholic.⁴

Law on conspicuous religious signs : In March 2004, the French Parliament adopted a law that prohibits state school students from wearing clothing or insignia that "ostensibly manifest a religious affiliation"⁵

On 30th January 2018, France's National Assembly adopted a new dress code barring deputies from wearing "any conspicuous religious sign, a uniform, a logo or commercial message, or political slogans"⁶

Law on the full-body veil : On 11th October 2010, Nicolas Sarkozy, then President of France, promulgated the law "prohibiting the concealment of the face in the public space". This law made wearing the niqab (which shows only the eyes) or the burqa (full-face veil) punishable by a fine of up to EUR€150.⁷

Law on the burkini : During the summer of 2016, some 30 mayors, most of them Conservatives, banned the Muslim swimsuit known as the “burkini” because they saw it as a threat to public order. However, the higher French administrative jurisdiction, the Conseil d’Etat, suspended or cancelled most of the bans, on the grounds that public order was not at stake.⁸

Anti-terrorism law: After 1st November 2017, French lawmakers passed an anti-terrorist law intended to replace the legislation in force during the state of emergency.

Under the new law, the prefect is still allowed to order administrative searches but only after consulting a prosecutor and after the decision has been validated by a judge.⁹ The prefect is still authorised to close places of worship if they propagate – either orally or in printed form – ideas and theories inciting worshippers to violence, hatred, discrimination, terrorism, or if they support terrorism.

House arrests are replaced by “individual measures of surveillance”. Freedom of movement is extended from the place of residence to the commune and it can be extended to the département if the suspect accepts to wear an electronic bracelet.

Controls of personal identification documents are possible without prior authorisation of a judicial authority at the border, near and in train stations, or within a 20 km radius from international ports and airports.¹⁰

Incidents

In 2016, the number of racist, anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish incidents decreased for the first time. However, the number of anti-Christian incidents dramatically increased over the same period, according to the annual report of the French Ministry of the Interior. This is most probably due to the lack of protection of Christian sites by state forces during that period as the number of anti-Christian incidents decreased the next year in a context of reinforcement of surveillance by the police and the military.

2015’s record number of racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents (2,034), clearly decreased in 2016 when incidents declined by 44.7 percent.¹¹

In 2017, the number of incidents involving the vandalisation of Christian and Muslim graves and places of worship decreased. However, vandalism cases against Jewish sites increased by 22 percent, compared with 2016, according to the Ministry of the Interior.¹²

The national statistics for 2017 recorded: 950 racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents in 2017 down 16 percent on the year before.¹³

The number of anti-Muslim incidents (121) dramatically decreased by 34.5 percent. The number of racist incidents (518) dropped by 14.8 percent. The number of anti-Semitic incidents (311) diminished by 7.2 percent. However, of those 311 incidents, the number of acts of violence against Jews has increased: 97 in 2017 against 77 in 2016.¹⁴

Concerning acts of vandalism against religious sites and graves, Christian sites were less targeted: 878 in 2017 against 949 in 2016, and Muslim sites were also less targeted: 72 in 2017 against 85 in 2016.¹⁵

Terrorism-related issues

After three coordinated terrorist attacks were carried out in Paris on the night of 13th November 2015 – leaving 130 people dead and hundreds wounded in Le Bataclan theatre,¹⁶ Stade de France football stadium, and restaurants and bars – the Government of the then President François Hollande, put in place a state of emergency which was prolonged several times¹⁷ until it was lifted by President Macron on 1st November 2017.¹⁸

According to statistics from the Interior Ministry, published on 1st February 2017, 4,320 places of worship and religious community buildings were under surveillance and protection of mobile (non-static) patrols by law enforcement and military forces in 2016:¹⁹

- 2,400 out of 45,000 Christian sites (5 percent)
- 1,100 out of 2500 Muslim sites (44 percent)
- 820 Jewish synagogues, schools and community centres (100 percent)

On Easter day 2018, 70,000 law enforcement forces were mobilised for the protection of Christian and Jewish places of worship according to a press release published by the Ministry on 30th March.²⁰

In 2017, 20 terrorist attempts were foiled, according to Gérard Collomb, Minister of the Interior²¹. During the state of emergency from November 2015 to 1st November 2017, 32 attempts were foiled, 4457 administrative searches were carried out at the residences of individuals who had relations with jihadist movements, 625 weapons were discovered. During the state of emergency, 19 Muslim places of worship suspected of hosting preachers spreading hate speeches were closed.²²

Related to Islam

Deportation of controversial preachers:

From 2012 to 2015, the then Interior Ministry deported 40 Muslim clerics; and another 52 people, including clerics, were also deported in 2016-2017.²³

In 2017, 20 radicalised foreign nationals were expelled from French territory, according to French Interior Minister Gérard Collomb.²⁴

On 19th April, the controversial 63-year-old Salafist preacher, Imam El Hadi Douidi, was expelled to Algeria following a lengthy legal process.²⁵ Douidi's expulsion application had been suspended pending a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which finally ruled in favour of the deportation on 19th April.²⁶

Among other things, Douidi was preaching that Jews are “unclean, the brothers of monkeys and pigs”, that women could not leave their homes without their husband’s permission and that an apostate should to receive the death penalty.²⁷

In March, France expelled Mohammed Tlaghi, a substitute imam at a mosque in Torcy, an eastern Parisian suburb, due to radical sermons.²⁸

Related to Judaism

On 21st April 2018, over 250 French personalities signed a declaration against “the new antisemitism” which is characterised by acts of violence perpetrated in the name of Islam. Among them were former President Nicolas Sarkozy, three former Prime Ministers, elected officials, intellectuals, artists, writers, and so on.²⁹

On 23rd March 2018, an 85-year-old Jewish woman, Ms Mireille Knoll, was killed in her apartment in Paris. Her body had been set alight and stabbed 11 times. The case was treated by French prosecutors as an anti-Semitic attack. In 1942, she escaped the notorious Vel d’Hiv round up of some 13,000 Jews in Paris, who were then deported to Nazi death camps. Two men, aged 22 and 29, were arrested and placed under formal investigation over the murder.³⁰

At the end of January 2018, two teenagers beat an 8-year-old Jewish boy wearing a kippah in suburban Paris in what French prosecutors called an anti-Semitic attack.³¹

On 10th January 2018, a 15-year-old Jewish girl was slashed in the face by an unidentified assailant on a street in the suburb of Sarcelles while walking home from her private Jewish school. She was wearing school uniform, which would have identified her as Jewish.³²

On 9th January 2018, two kosher shops in Creteil, another suburb of Paris, were torched two weeks after the same shops were attacked by individuals who painted swastikas on their facades. The incident took place three years to the day since an assault on a Jewish supermarket by a French Islamist gunman Amely Coulibaly during which three customers and an employee were killed. Creteil counts some 23,000 Jews among its 90,000 residents, according to community leader Albert Elharrar. He added that Jewish groups believe the shops were deliberately targeted at the time of commemorations for the 2015 attacks. A record 7,900 French Jews emigrated to Israel the year of the Hyper Cacher attack, many of them citing increased fears over anti-Semitism.³³

On 2nd December 2016, a Jewish man wearing a kippah was insulted and then chased by an individual who punched him and then attacked him with a knife. The wounded victim was hospitalised needing surgery on his arm.³⁴

Related to Christianity

During the first three months of 2018, the Observatoire de la Christianophobie recorded 69 anti-Christian incidents in France, an increase of 12 percent in comparison with the same period in 2017.³⁵

In the first two weeks of April 2018, arson attempts took place at the Church of St Gervais in Langon (Gironde) and in the Cathedral of Saint-Omer; a priest was stabbed by burglars in his church in Tassin-la-Demi-Lune (Rhône); several churches were desecrated in Belley-Ars diocese (Ain), Saint-Jean-in-Saint-Maurice-sur-Loire (Loire) and Saint-André-de-Valborgnes (Gard).³⁶

On 24th November 2017, a court in Carcassonne sentenced a Muslim woman, known only by her first name “Kenza”, for vandalising and desecrating St Marie Madeleine Church in Rennes-le-Château. She was given a suspended two-year prison term and ordered to pay €17,718 in repairs. On 23rd April 2017, she had gone to the church with an axe and struck the holy water stoup. She then decapitated the well-known statue of Asmodea (the demon from the Book of Tobit) positioned below the stoup, cut off its arm, and placed a Qur’an on the ground there. She also lacerated the bas-relief of the altar and damaged a statue of Mary Magdalen.³⁷

In October 2017, France’s top administrative court gave the town of Ploermel (Morbihan) six months to remove the cross above a statue of John Paul II standing in a public square in a bid to comply with the 1905 law enforcing the secular nature of public spaces. The statue whose arch features a cross, was installed in a public square in October 2006. A group of local citizens then launched a legal drive to remove the cross. Finally, the statue was moved a few metres to a privately owned space which was fully visible from the public space.³⁸

On 26th July 2016, two 19-year-olds in Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray (Seine Maritime), slit the throat of Father Jacques Hamel, 85, as he was celebrating morning Mass, and seriously injured another member of the congregation. The two attackers, who claimed to be “soldiers” of Daesh (ISIS) were shot dead by police.³⁹

Related to Other Issues

No community on the French governments list of cults and sects was sentenced on criminal charges during 2016-2017. However, on 7th December 2017, the Administrative Appeal Court of Paris condemned the MIVILUDES (judgement no 15PA02819) for damaging the reputation of the of the National Association of Kinesitherapists Practicing Fasciotherapy and the group Point d’Appui which, until 2012, provided training in fasciotherapy to osteopaths and professionals in similar professions.

MIVILUDES, a governmental agency which monitors cultic groups which might threaten public order or contravene French law, not only included fasciotherapy in its brochure “Health and Cultic Deviations” but also described it as a dangerous medical technique.⁴⁰ The court ruled that MIVILUDES must remove the reference from its report, pay the plaintiffs €1500 in damages and publish the court decision on its website and in all other media in which it had warned against the practice.⁴¹

The publications of MIVILUDES, which ostensibly examine dangerous cults, have been repeatedly criticised by human rights NGOs at the UN, the CoE and the OSCE for stigmatising non-traditional religious groups and their members.

As of 1st April 2018, hundreds of Chinese members of the Church of Almighty God⁴² who had fled persecution in their country were under threat of being deported back to China. France had rejected 355 requests for asylum out of 442 and issued 158 orders of departure.⁴³

Prospects for freedom of religion

The laïcité principle (separation between state and religion) enshrined in the Constitution and the 1905 Law in France are the cornerstones of the relations between state and religion. All the religions present on French territory at that time progressively integrated their religious practices within this constitutional and legal framework.

Islam, which was mainly imported into the country through migration from its former colonies, and more recently from countries at war, is progressively following the same course. However, new radical forms of Islam have entered the country through internet, the propaganda of Daesh (ISIS), and fundamentalist preachers. Their proponents openly challenge France's secular character in the public space and in courts, e.g. street prayers, the wearing of the veil in schools and gender segregation in swimming pools. It can be expected that this will not change in the short term.

Moreover, hundreds of radicalised young people have left France to fight with Daesh in Syria. Others have committed terrorist attacks in France and in Belgium claiming hundreds of victims. Despite the attempts of foreign extremist ideologists to fracture French society, the French have remained united whatever their religion or beliefs and have condemned the murderous attacks of those who had sworn allegiance to ISIS. Statistics supplied by the French Ministry of the Interior indicated that the number of anti-Muslim incidents fell in 2016 and 2017.

Endnotes

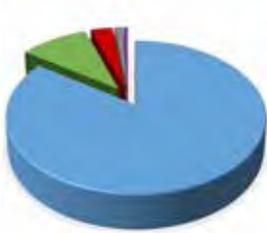
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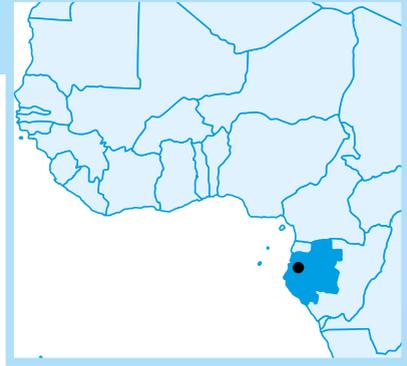
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GABON

RELIGION



- Christians: 84,7%
- Muslims: 10,2%
- Ethnoreligionists: 3,2%
- Agnostics: 1,3%
- Others: 0,6%



AREA	POPULATION
267.667km ²	1.763.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Gabon is ruled by the 1991 constitution, which was modified in August 2003 and in January 2018. The latest constitutional reform did not modify article 1, which (in section 2) enshrines “freedom of conscience, thought, opinion, expression, communication, the free practice of religion, [which] are guaranteed to all, under the reservation of respect of public order”.¹ Because of this legal provision, the Ministry of Internal Affairs banned a Church named “Plenitude Exode” in April 2012, after receiving numerous reports of public nuisance relating to noisy prayer services held nightly.²

The constitution affirms the secular character of the state. Article 1 (section 13) guarantees “the right to form associations [. . .] as well as religious communities [. . .] under conditions fixed by the law”, and that “religious communities [can] conduct and administer their own affairs in an independent manner, under reserve of respect of the principles of national sovereignty [and] public order”. Finally, all acts of discrimination on any basis, including religious affiliation, are forbidden.

Official registration of religious groups is not compulsory, although the government advises religious groups to do so in order to enjoy full constitutional protection. The Ministry of Interior keeps a record of all registered religious groups, which are not required to apply for building permits. Such groups can apply for a tax-free certificate once they get official recognition as non-profit organisations. Should a religious group not comply with these requirements, it can still carry out its activities, but it will be required to pay duties for any imports and will not be exempted from taxes.

Although Gabon is a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (because Islam is the religion of its leaders), it is constitutionally a secular state. It was the first African nation to sign an agreement with the Holy See in 1977, which is still in force.³ This accord gives full legal recognition to the Catholic Church and all its institutions and recognises the legality of marriages contracted under canon law.

The main religious groups – Catholic, Protestant and Muslim – have the right to own and administer primary and secondary schools. These facilities must be registered with the Ministry of Education.

The following religious festivals are observed as national public holidays: All Saints'; Ascension; Assumption of Our Lady; Christmas; Easter Sunday; Easter Monday; Pentecost; Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Kebir.

Incidents

Following the presidential elections of 27th August 2016, violence broke out between supporters of the ruling party that claimed victory for President Ali Bongo and the opposition, which challenged the results. In a letter dated 6th September 2016, signed by the chairman of the Bishops' Conference, Bishop Mathieu Madega of Mouila, Gabon's prelates denounced the "lack of truth in the democratic process and the non-respect of human rights".⁴ Many members of the clergy and prominent leaders of the laity felt that the bishops' message fell short of directly censuring the serious irregularities recorded during the elections as well as the harsh repression that ensued against members of the opposition. Many Catholics felt that confrontation with the authorities had been avoided by the bishops' failure to mention electoral fraud in their statement.⁵

After the elections, Abbé Dimitri Ayatebe Ename, a diocesan priest from Libreville, and Director of Studies at the Saint Jean Minor Seminary, gave a homily on 16th October 2016 denouncing the country's "dictatorial, cynical, obscure, perverse and murderous"⁶ political system. Four days later, on 20th October, Lambert-Noël Matha, Minister of Internal Affairs, sent a letter of complaint to the rector of the seminary, Abbé Laurent Manvoula, sending a copy to the Archbishop Basile Mve Engore of Libreville. The minister accused Fr Ayatebe of causing offence to the institutions of the Republic. He said the priest had referred to the electoral results "in a sectarian manner".⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

Interfaith dialogue among senior Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic leaders concluded that there were no significant societal pressures or actions against religious freedom. Leaders of all three faiths met regularly, attended each other's main festivals and worked together to promote religious tolerance and defend freedom of religion. The interfaith dialogue and activities included discussions of religious issues. Before the August presidential elections, the leaders of all three major faiths issued a joint appeal for domestic peace and interfaith dialogue.⁸

In common with many other countries in the central African region, Gabon has experienced growing political and social tensions over the past decade. So far however, no trends have been detected suggesting that these circumstances could have negative effects on freedom of religion, a right that the country has always upheld. It seems that respect for freedom of religion is likely to continue.

Endnotes

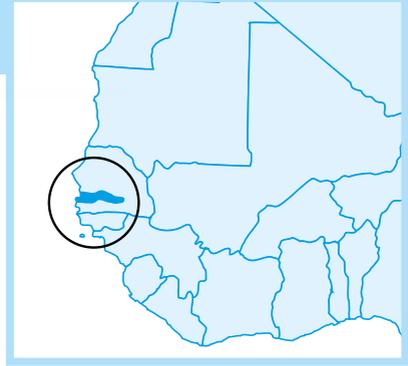
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GAMBIA

RELIGION



- Muslims: 88,8%
- Ethnoreligionists: 5,3%
- Christians: 4,5%
- Others: 1,4%



GAMBIA

AREA	POPULATION
11.295km ²	2.055.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

According to Article 1 of its constitution, the Gambia is a sovereign, secular republic.¹ Article 25 guarantees freedom of religion. The government has generally respected this provision. Religious communities are not required to register with the authorities. For Muslims, Shari'a law applies to marriages, divorces and inheritance matters. The national law provides for Islamic and Christian religious instruction in state and private schools; this is generally respected by the government.

The situation in the Gambia regarding religious freedom has improved significantly during the period under review. For example, in January 2017 the new President, Adama Barrow, reversed the decision by his predecessor, long-time dictator Yahya Jammeh, to make the Gambia an Islamic republic.² The constitution had declared the country to be a secular state but in December 2015 Jammeh renamed the Gambia an "Islamic Republic", making it the second such country in Africa after Mauritania.³

Initially, Jammeh issued no official statement detailing the specific effects of establishing an Islamic state. In any case, he lost popular support and, following the December 2016 presidential election, the country saw a peaceful transition of power. It was the first such peaceful democratic transfer of government since the Gambia gained its independence in 1965.

Following the elections, Jammeh – initially at least and to the surprise of all observers – admitted his electoral defeat and released some opposition figures.⁴ However, on 9th December 2016 he publicly rejected the election result. He insisted on remaining in office and called for new elections. As a result, the Economic Community of West African States,⁵ with the backing of the UN Security Council, made a concerted effort to mediate and put pressure on Jammeh – initially in vain – to resign from office. It was only the threat of military intervention that convinced Jammeh to concede.⁶

During his time in office, Jammeh had largely suppressed opposition political forces, an independent judiciary and media critical of the government. Time and again, the regime arranged for those it did not approve of to "disappear" and committed numerous human rights violations.

After his inauguration, Barrow stated that the country would once again be known as a “Republic”, removing the word “Islamic” instituted by Jammeh. He also pledged to promote good governance, the rule of law and democratic institutions, freedom of the press and the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He also announced a return to the Commonwealth community that the country had left in 2013. Barrow also overturned Jammeh’s decision to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC). Barrow’s party, the United Democratic Party (UDP), scored a clear victory in the elections to the new parliament held in April 2017 – elections that were considered peaceful, free and fair.

Incidents

Inter-faith relations in this predominantly Islamic country have traditionally been good. Sufism, for instance – known for its tolerant attitude towards people of other faiths – has a strong position in the Gambia. It consists of brotherhoods – the Tijaniyya, the Qadiriya and the Muradiya, for example – that are known for their particular form of mysticism and their non-violent views.

The announcement, however, that the Gambia would be transformed into an Islamic Republic had caused great concern in civil society. Fears eased considerably after Adama Barrow became president and when he stated he was scrapping Jammeh’s Islamisation plans. The new government is reportedly concerned with opening up the Gambia to the international community and defending the country against extremist tendencies.⁷

Islamic organisations and the Catholic Church maintain good relations. In addition to the major Muslim festivals, the Christian feasts of Christmas, Good Friday and Easter are celebrated. Members of the Interfaith Group for Dialogue and Peace, which includes Muslims, Christians and Baha’is, meet regularly to discuss matters of importance to all of the religious communities in the Gambia, particularly interfaith coexistence.⁸

Marriages between Christians and Muslims are not uncommon in the Gambia. Occasionally, there are tensions within Muslim neighbourhoods if a resident intends to convert to Christianity. This usually happens in the context of marriage.⁹

There were no serious violations of religious freedom during the reporting period.

Prospects for freedom of religion

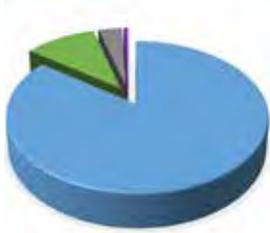
Social stability is suffering as a result of growing migration. According to the United Nations, the Gambia is one of the poorest countries in the world.¹⁰ The exodus of young people to Europe is particularly problematic. The new government is trying to counteract migration through legal and economic measures. Those who leave the country usually leave large gaps behind, not just in their own family but often in the broader community and their religious group as well. The money transferred from abroad is very important for many families, but it cannot outweigh the long-term absence of young family members.

Endnotes

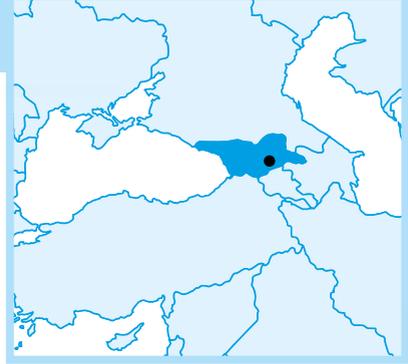
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GEORGIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 85,2%
- Muslims: 10,6%
- Agnostics: 3,5%
- Others: 0,7%



AREA

69.700km²

POPULATION

3.980.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article nine of Georgia's constitution upholds the "absolute freedom of belief and religion"¹ and equality for all, regardless of belief.² The constitution prohibits religious persecution, forbids acts forcing individuals to express views on religion and bars public and political associations that foment religious animosity. The law provides for freedom of religious belief, denomination, and conscience, including the right to choose and change religious affiliation. Religious issues are managed by the State Agency on Religious Issues (SARI), also known as the State Agency for Religious Affairs.

Article nine of the constitution also recognises the important role of the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia, (the Georgian Orthodox Church) in the country's history. That said, it stipulates that the GOC should be independent from the state and that relations between the GOC and the state should be governed by a constitutional agreement, also called a concordat.³ The agreement grants the GOC rights which are not given to other religious groups. These include legal immunity for the GOC Patriarch, exemption of GOC clergy from military service, and a consultative role for the GOC in government, especially in education.⁴

Article 13 of the "Law of Georgia on General Education" from 2005 states that public schools may not be used for the purposes of religious indoctrination, proselytism, or forcible assimilation.⁵ At the same time, Article five of the concordat gives the GOC the right to teach its creed in educational institutions and authorises the state to pay for GOC religious schools.⁶

According to the US State Department International Religious Freedom Report, some NGOs and religious organisations complained that the government "inadequately address[ed] acts of religious intolerance and discrimination in favour of the GOC in public schools".⁷ The Tolerance Centre has reported that non-Georgian Orthodox Churches continued to face government resistance when attempting to obtain construction permits for churches.⁸ NGOs reported incidents of religious discrimination in schools, including cases "involving the promotion of Georgian Orthodox theology" in religious studies courses, Georgian Orthodox prayers in classrooms, and the erection of religious symbols such as of icons in spite of the law, which prohibits proselytism.⁹

In December 2017 the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church called for religious education at all school levels, a proposal which is now being considered by some government officials. Some have criticised the proposal for being a disguised attempt at religious indoctrination in the spirit of Georgian Orthodoxy.¹⁰

Jehovah's Witnesses have continued to face discrimination from the de facto governments of the two secessionist republics. In South Ossetia they are not recognised as an official religious group. The authorities in Abkhazia meanwhile continued to impose a ban on the group. In October media sources reported the South Ossetian government as saying that up to 1,000 Jehovah's Witnesses were in the territory and that it was considering legislation to ban the distribution of Jehovah's Witnesses literature because of its "extremist" content.¹¹

According to the US State Department religious freedom report, in the Gali district of Abkhazia the de facto authorities "reportedly did not permit GOC clergy to travel to [the region] to conduct religious services and ethnic Georgians were unable to attend services in their own language".¹² According to a SARI report, the ethnic Georgian population in the district reportedly travelled to Georgian-controlled territory to mark major religious holidays. The GOC clergy were not permitted to conduct services in Abkhazia.

In Abkhazia SARI reported – in the words of the US State Department religious freedom report: "GOC churches were in a 'deplorable state' and that local authorities had erased frescoes in almost all of them."¹³ However, lately there have been promising signs of rapprochement between the Orthodox Churches of Georgia and Russia on the question of Abkhazia. Church leaders from both sides vowed to jointly resolve the difficult situation.¹⁴

Incidents

Some Jehovah's Witnesses complained about interference in their religious activities. In some cases, people were physically assaulted. In one incident, in July 2016, "two female Jehovah's Witnesses were sharing a Bible verse [in a public] square when a passer-by began kicking and verbally attacking them, ripping their clothes. In another incident unknown attackers threw stones at members of the group."¹⁵

The following October, media described a protest rally that took place during the Pope's visit to the country. The group, which included some GOC clergy, called Pope Francis a "heretic", "the greatest enemy of orthodoxy, greater than Islam" and "a wolf in sheep's clothing". When the GOC Patriarch greeted the Pope on his arrival, he criticised the priests opposed to the Pontiff's visit.¹⁶

The GOC is divided on its attitude towards the small but growing Protestant communities. There is a radical faction that wants harsher measures against all non-Orthodox denominations and religious groups, especially Catholics, Evangelicals, Baptists and the Salvation Army, as well as Jews. In early 2017, the Georgian Orthodox Patriarch appeared to be the target of a plot to assassinate him with poison. The main suspect, a GOC archpriest, was close to the ultra-orthodox faction within the GOC, which had been feuding with the Patriarch.¹⁷ He was eventually tried and convicted by a Georgian court for trying to kill the Patriarch's secretary.¹⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

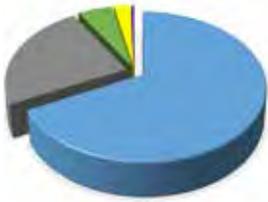
The prospects for freedom of religion in Georgia depend to some degree on the relationship between the GOC and other religious denominations. Some GOC officials have pledged to support ecumenism and cooperation with religious minorities, while more radical followers of Georgian Orthodoxy seem to champion the idea of religious uniformity. Another problem is the ramifications for religious freedom resulting from the continued conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. During the period under review, the status of religious freedom has remained for the most part unchanged.

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GERMANY

RELIGION



- Christians: 67,5%
- Agnostics: 24%
- Muslims: 5,4%
- Atheists: 2,6%
- Others: 0,5%



GERMANY

AREA	POPULATION
357.376km ²	80.682.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Basic Law (Germany's constitution) provides for equality before the law and guarantees that no one may be disadvantaged or favoured on the grounds of faith or religious opinion.¹ Article four of the Basic Law protects freedom of faith and of conscience, as well as the freedom to profess a creed and practise religion and the right to conscientious objection to military service.²

The Basic Law prohibits a state Church. Religious groups may organise themselves freely and are not required to register with the government. However, to qualify for tax-exempt status, religious groups must register as non-profit associations.³ Religious societies may apply to organise themselves as public law corporations (Körperschaften, PLC) and, if granted this status, may levy Church taxes and appoint prison, military, and hospital chaplains.⁴ According to the Basic Law, the decision to grant PLC status is made at the state level and is based on factors including the group's size, activities, and respect for the constitutional order and fundamental rights.

An estimated 180 religious groups enjoy PLC status.⁵ No state has given the Church of Scientology (COS) PLC or non-profit status. Scientologists have also been blocked from public employment through the use of "sect filters".⁶ Few Muslim groups have PLC status.⁷ The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV) and some State Offices (Landesbehörde für Verfassungsschutz, LfV) monitor the activities of the COS, as well as a number of Muslim groups, which they suspect of furthering extremist goals.⁸

In February 2017, after more than 450 police officers conducted 24 raids, authorities shut down the Fussilet 33 mosque in Berlin as a result of its radicalisation and terrorist fundraising activities. Anis Amri, who committed a terrorist attack against a Berlin Christmas market in December 2016, had been a frequent visitor to the mosque.⁹

In August 2016 the government of North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW) suspended PLC status negotiations with four Islamic organisations, including the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Türk-İslam Birliği, DITIB) and the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland, ZMD) due to concerns about DITIB's

ties to Turkey.¹⁰ In 2017, the NRW Integration Minister announced that if DITIB broke ties with Turkey, it could join with the Liberal Islamic Federation (Liberal-Islamischer Bund) and others to advise on expanding Islamic religious instruction in the state.¹¹

The Federal Constitutional Court ruled in November 2017 that blanket headscarf bans for teachers at public schools are a violation of religious freedom but held that states could decide whether circumstances warranted a ban. The State of North-Rhine Westphalia changed its laws to permit it, whereas in Bavaria and Saarland decisions are taken on a case-by-case basis.¹² In April 2017 the Bundestag approved a partial ban on the full-face Islamic veil known as the burka.¹³ Civil servants and soldiers are prohibited from wearing burkas at work and all people must show their faces during identity checks.¹⁴

Home schooling, including for religious reasons, is not permitted.¹⁵ A Christian family took its case against Germany to the European Court of Human Rights in 2017 (process still open) after authorities took the children into temporary custody and imposed penalties on their parents for home schooling in 2013.¹⁶

Religious instruction (or ethics courses for those who opt-out of religious education) in public schools is available in all states. Religious groups are permitted to establish private schools, provided they meet state curriculum requirements.¹⁷

Laws among states differ regarding halal and kosher ritual slaughter practices and circumcision of males. Federal law permits religious groups to appoint trained individuals to circumcise males younger than six months old. Circumcision of boys older than six months must be performed in a “medically professional manner” without unnecessary pain.¹⁸

In 2017, members of the Alternative for Germany party (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) made public comments that denounced a Holocaust Memorial as a “monument of shame” and claimed that “Islam is a construct that neither knows nor respects religious freedom”.¹⁹ After the AfD entered the Bundestag for the first time in the September 2017 elections, both Muslim and Jewish groups expressed fears about increasing right-wing extremism.²⁰

On 1st October 2017, the Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) went into effect. The legislation requires any internet platform with more than 2 million users (including Facebook, Twitter, Google, YouTube, and others) to delete or block “clearly illegal content”, including religiously motivated hate speech, or face fines of up to 50 million euros.²¹

Incidents

Official figures for hate crimes with an anti-Christian or anti-Muslim bias were not available for 2016, as they were recorded under the broader category of “bias against religion”.²² In January 2017, police added the categories of anti-Christian and anti-Muslim hate crimes.²³

The Federal Criminal Police Office (Bundeskriminalamt, BKA) reported 129 anti-Christian hate crimes in 2017, 34 of which were violent. The majority of these were motivated by “religious ideology”.²⁴ The OSCE 2016 hate crime report’s civil society contribution of data included 40 anti-Christian incidents.²⁵

In 2016, the NGO Open Doors published two surveys among Christian refugees. The second, conducted in October 2016, expanded the data collected in its May 2016 survey of 231 refugees. According to Open Doors, as many as 40,000 Christian refugees had been harassed, insulted, and attacked in asylum centres.²⁶ Calling its results from the combined surveys the “tip of the iceberg”, it reported that 743 Christian refugees had been the victims of religiously motivated violent crimes and bullying between January and September 2016. Most respondents reported more than one incident. Respondents reported fellow Muslim refugees were responsible in 91 percent of the incidents.²⁷ According to the BKA, attacks in refugee shelters decreased in 2017 to pre-2015 numbers.²⁸

In August 2016, 14 young Christian Iranians fled their accommodations after being threatened with death for months by a group of Muslims living there. The Christians described the situation as similar to the one they fled in Iran.²⁹

In December 2016, a Tunisian man stole a truck and drove it into a crowded Berlin Christmas market, killing 12 and injuring 50 people. He had pledged allegiance to Daesh (ISIS) and encouraged others to kill “crusader pigs”. Daesh rhetorically uses the term “Crusaders” to refer to Christians.³⁰

A Christian Afghan refugee was badly beaten and threatened with a knife outside his home near Frankfurt in August 2016 by four Muslim Afghans shouting “Allahu Akbar”. This was the third time he had been attacked.³¹ Also in August 2016, a Christian asylum seeker was attacked in Berlin after being identified as Christian.³² In July 2017, a man was attacked on a Berlin tram for wearing a cross necklace³³ and in September 2017 an Afghan man wearing a cross necklace was beaten by men who asked why he had become a Christian.³⁴

In January 2017, a self-proclaimed “anti-theist” was sentenced to life in prison for the August 2016 religiously motivated murder of his Christian flatmate. Three days before the crime, the man had written a text saying he was sorry he could not kill more Christians.³⁵

In April 2017, a Muslim Afghan asylum seeker murdered a woman, an Afghan Christian convert, in front of her children. The court called it a religiously motivated crime and sentenced him to life in prison in 2018.³⁶

One person died after a radicalised refugee attacked people with a knife in a supermarket in Hamburg-Barmbek in July 2017. The attacker said his goal was to “kill Christians and young people” and die as a martyr.³⁷

Vandalism of churches and public Christian symbols included the destruction with an axe of four summit crosses in the Bavarian Alps over a three-month period in 2016;³⁸ the attack against more than 60 Christian statues in the Münsterland region from October 2016 to April 2017;³⁹ and arson in churches causing damage worth several million euros.⁴⁰

According to the BKA, anti-Semitic offences in 2017 increased slightly compared to 2016, from 1,468 (34 violent) to 1,504 (37 violent). The vast majority of them were attributed to right-wing prejudice (94 percent).⁴¹ In the OSCE’s 2016 hate crime report, police counted 185 anti-Semitic hate crimes, including 28 physical assaults and two murders. Civil society groups reported 136 incidents, including 37 violent attacks against people in 2016.⁴²

In April 2017 the Independent Experts Group on Anti-Semitism (Unabhängiger Expertenkreis Antisemitismus, UEA), set up by the Bundestag, presented its report. It noted with concern anti-Semitism by Muslims, particularly refugees and migrants, as well as far-right extremists. The UEA pointed to the spread of hate speech and anti-Semitic agitation on social media and said that Jews “are also increasingly concerned for their safety due to everyday experiences of antisemitism. Such incidents often are not considered to be criminal offenses; they are seldom reported, or law enforcement authorities do not even consider them to be antisemitic (sic)”⁴³

Examples of physical attacks against people include a June 2016 assault against a Jewish man by a group shouting anti-Semitic insults. An Israeli tourist and his daughter were threatened and assaulted by a group in August 2016. An Israeli citizen was punched in the face after revealing his nationality in October 2016.⁴⁴

On 9th November 2016, the 78th anniversary of the anti-Jewish pogrom known as Kristallnacht, a neo-Nazi group posted a map on Facebook entitled “Jews Among Us” with the names and addresses of 70 Jewish-owned businesses, including kindergartens. Two weeks later, after pressure from German lawmakers, Facebook deleted the image, as well as the page of the group that had published it.⁴⁵

Media widely reported in March 2017 the story of a Jewish couple in Berlin who removed their son from a public high school after four months of anti-Semitic harassment and physical violence mainly by Arab or Turkish classmates. The Jewish High School in Berlin receives between six and 10 applications a year from parents whose children have been harassed at other schools.⁴⁶

In December 2017 following protests over the US decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, Jewish representatives expressed concerns about security around synagogues and Jewish schools. In some incidents, protesters burnt Israeli flags, displayed Hamas symbols and chanted anti-Semitic slogans. Chancellor Merkel told the press that she condemned “this violation of fundamental principles of the rule of law” and opposed “any form of anti-Semitism”.⁴⁷

After an April 2018 attack in Berlin on two young men wearing Jewish skullcaps by a Syrian refugee,⁴⁸ Chancellor Merkel said “another form of anti-Semitism” had been brought into Germany by Arab refugees and that she was “dismayed” that Jewish schools and synagogues required police protection.⁴⁹

Examples of damage to property include a Stolperstein stone⁵⁰ that was intentionally damaged in 2016; a Holocaust memorial vandalised multiple times in 2016; the word “Jew” painted on a Jewish family’s apartment door;⁵¹ and several Jewish gravesites and cemeteries vandalised in 2017.⁵²

The BKA also reported 1,075 anti-Muslim hate crimes in 2017, 56 of which were violent. The majority of these were attributed to right-wing bias.⁵³ Civil society groups reported 31 such incidents to the OSCE in 2016, including 14 violent attacks against people.⁵⁴

The PEGIDA movement (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes or Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West) and similar groups continued to organise weekly demonstrations in Dresden in 2016 and 2017 and supporters regularly expressed anti-Muslim sentiments during the rallies. The number of participants declined significantly from 2015 but remained constant at about 1,500 to 2,000 protesters per rally in 2017.⁵⁵

According to a survey by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights in September 2017, discrimination against Muslims in Germany has both a religious and racial component. Of the Turkish Muslims surveyed, 18 percent reported experiencing discrimination over the previous 12 months compared to 50 percent of Muslims from sub-Saharan Africa.⁵⁶

In September 2016, a study found that in order to gain employment, women who wear headscarves must apply four times more often than other women.⁵⁷ According to the European Network against Racism, women who wear headscarves reported discrimination during the job application process, partly because German employers often ask applicants to attach a photo to their CVs.⁵⁸

Incidents involving Muslim women include a June 2016 attack on a teenage girl who “was subjected to racist insults and had her headscarf ripped off”. In July 2016, a woman “was subjected to anti-Muslim slurs and punched in the face”.⁵⁹ On three occasions in April 2018, a bus driver in Lower Saxony refused to let a pregnant woman wearing a full-face veil onto his bus.⁶⁰

On 26th September 2016, a bomb exploded at a Dresden mosque while the imam and his wife and sons were inside the building. There were no reported injuries. As a result, security was increased around other Muslim sites.⁶¹ In December 2016, a 29-year-old man who had reportedly previously spoken at a PEGIDA rally about “criminal foreigners” and “lazy Africans” was charged with the attack.⁶² As of the end of June 2018, his trial was still underway.⁶³

Prospects for freedom of religion

It appears that there were few significant new or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period under review. However, if certain anti-migrant political parties continue to gain popularity, there may be greater risk of legislative proposals further restricting religious freedom for minority religions, particularly Muslims. Additionally, there is an increased risk of societal intolerance against both majority and minority religions, some of which may be a backlash to global terrorism or existing geopolitical conflicts attributed to religious groups, as well as sentiments raised by radical secularist trends in Germany.

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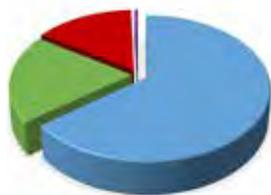
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GHANA

RELIGION



- Christians: 64,5%
- Muslims: 19,9%
- Ethnoreligionists: 15,1%
- Others: 0,5%



AREA	POPULATION
238.537km ²	28.033.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Republic of Ghana is one of the most politically stable countries in Africa. This is true with respect to fundamental human rights as well as economic development. Although Ghana's economic growth has fallen, from 4.2 percent in 2014 to 3.5 percent in 2016 – a record low for the past 26 years – the medium-term outlook remains favourable, as evidenced by recent IMF growth forecasts.¹

The stable economic and political situation contributes to what in many respects are exemplary relations between Ghana's various religions and other faith communities. Social tensions tend to be less acute in areas in which poverty is less prevalent. In December 2016, Ghana had its seventh democratic elections since the first multi-party elections of 1992. As in 2000 and 2008, the transition of power was peaceful when Nana Akufo-Addo defeated incumbent President John Dramani Mahama (elected in 2012).²

A former British colony, Ghana gained independence in 1957, becoming the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to do so. Its religious diversity is particularly notable.³ About two-thirds of the population is Christian, and a much smaller group are Muslim. Pentecostals and members of the Charismatic Movement predominate among Christians, followed by Protestants and then by Catholics.⁴ For the most part, the country's Muslims are Sunnis. Islamic extremism is rare in Ghana.

Within the Ghana Conference on Religion and Peace, which includes the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, Christians and Muslims are working constructively towards the shared goal of peaceful coexistence.⁵ The foundation for the peaceful coexistence of religions is laid down in Article 21 of the country's constitution, which establishes the right to religious freedom.⁶ Although all religious communities are required by law to register with the authorities, in practice this obligation is not respected by many of the traditional African communities. To date, however, no action has been taken against those who have failed to register.⁷

Generally speaking, non-profit, religiously motivated activities, such as charity work or education, are tax-exempt. There were no signs of difficulties regarding the coexistence of different faith communities during the period under review.⁸

This freedom makes it possible for the Catholic Church in Ghana to play an important role in shaping society. In addition to its pastoral work, the Church is also involved in social activities in a variety of ways. Within the Catholic world, the Ghanaian Church is highly regarded both inside and outside the country. An example of this is the worldwide appeal by Ghanaian Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, that the papal encyclical 'Laudato Si' should be taken seriously and put into practice. For him, this encyclical contains not only an ecological message, but above all a social one.⁹

One problem facing not only Ghana but many other West African countries is the mass exodus of young people. Many are drawn to Europe by way of the western or central Mediterranean.¹⁰ The country's bishops have frequently called on citizens not to emigrate to Europe. The continent is no guarantee of prosperity, the bishops said in a statement issued in June 2016, which was also signed by the Christian Council of Ghana. In their statement the bishops said: "We are saddened by the news of many African migrants perishing in the deserts of northern Africa and the Mediterranean Sea and call on African states and Governments to institute proactive measures to curb this tragedy."¹¹ They also criticised a new trend of migration to South America. This journey was "becoming an emerging danger", the statement's signatories noted. The bishops wrote: "[Africans] must not assume that Europe and other places outside Africa guarantee automatic comforts and pleasure."¹² Religious leaders also addressed the danger of religious fanaticism in which "[s]ome so-called men and women of God are blatantly displaying their religious prowess and making gullible people believe that they have answers to all their problems"¹³

The Catholic bishops' public appeal had a positive response, not least in the political realm. At the first synod of the Catholic Church in Ghana dedicated to the topic of youth and vocation, the speaker of the Ghanaian Parliament, Joseph Osei-Owusu Osei-Owusu said: "In our country today, there is a growing emphasis on prosperity, especially among the youth. Society basically says: the richer you are, the better off you are. That is pretty much true if you live by the standard of secular society."¹⁴

The synod on 125 years of Catholic Mission in Accra: Renewing Our Commitment to Evangelization was held in advance of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops, the theme of which is Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment and which will be hosted in the Vatican in October 2018.

Incidents

There were no significant violations of religious freedom during the reporting period. As indicated above, the reason for this is the climate of religious tolerance traditionally found in Ghana. The phenomenon of rising Islamic jihadism in West Africa has not yet manifested itself in Ghana in the form of violent attacks.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

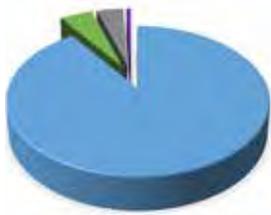
Due to the country's political stability, there is a high likelihood that the security of the religious communities represented in Ghana will remain intact. While improving economic development could provide relief, the problem of sizeable waves of migration to non-African countries is expected to persist.

Endnotes

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GREECE

RELIGION



- Christians: 90,4%
- Muslims: 4,9%
- Agnostics: 4%
- Others: 0,7%



AREA	POPULATION
131.957km ²	10.919.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 3 of the constitution declares that “the prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ”.¹ Freedom of religion and conscience are guaranteed by article 13, which states that “all known religions shall be free and their rites of worship shall be performed unhindered and under the protection of law”. This article also prohibits proselytism and offences of public order through rites of worship. It is further specified that the ministers of all known religions have the same obligations as those of the Greek Orthodox Church (GOC) and are likewise subject to the same state supervision.²

Article 16 is fundamental for an understanding of the state’s role in religious education. It defines education and the development of national and religious consciousness as a basic mission of the state.³

In 2014 the government issued a law regulating religious matters, the Law on Organisation of the Legal Form of Religious Communities and Their Organisations. Article 16 of the law states that the GOC, as well as the Jewish and Muslim communities, have traditionally been recognised as official religious legal entities. Other religious communities such as the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Ethiopian Orthodox, Copts, Armenian Orthodox, Assyrian Orthodox as well as two Evangelical groups received official recognition as legal entities through article 13. With such recognition, a religious group becomes a “known religion”, as specified in article 17. This allows each to legally transfer property as well as to operate houses of worship, monastic institutions and generally meeting houses for religious purposes. Article 3 describes the process of registration. The group needs to prove that it has no clandestine doctrines and functions openly.⁴

In April 2017, Greek polytheism or Hellenic Religion was granted legal recognition as a “known religion” by the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs.⁵

According to the US International Religious Freedom Report 2016, the GOC received from the government funding and support not available to other religious groups. This included the payment of salaries, religious training for the clergy and funding for religious instruction in schools. The GOC maintains an institutionalised link to the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Similar benefits are enjoyed in part and to a lesser extent by

the Muslim, Catholic and Jewish minorities. The three official Muftiates as well as some imams of the Thrace Muslim community receive their salary through the government. It also funded Catholic religious training and teachers' salaries in state schools on the islands of Syros and Tinos, as well as Holocaust awareness programs for students and teachers.⁶

Muslim communities not recognised as part of the minority created by the Treaty of Lausanne do not enjoy benefits such as the right to bilingual education, special quotas for university entry and jobs in the public sector. They cannot use Shari'a law in family matters or have optional Islamic religious classes in public schools.

One ongoing issue between the government and the Thrace Muslim community is the practice of appointing Muftis by the government, instead of the possibility of direct elections. The government defends this as appropriate because the Muftis have judicial powers. Muslims furthermore criticised the lack of Islamic cemeteries outside Thrace, as well as the delay in the construction of an official house of prayer in Athens.⁷ The construction was approved in 2014 and the mosque was supposed to be opened by April 2017, yet it remains unfinished.⁸

In November 2017, two muftis were sentenced to seven months in prison by a court in Thessaloniki for disturbing a religious ceremony and usurping authority. The two muftis, Ahmet Mete and Erkan Azizoğlu, were convicted over an incident at a funeral ceremony for a member of the Muslim Turkish Minority. The court ruled that they usurped the authority to lead the prayer service from the state-appointed mufti of the city of Xanthi in northern Greece. Following the court ruling, the prison sentences were suspended.⁹

In January 2018 the government introduced new legislation allowing members of the Thrace Muslim community to opt for secular courts in cases concerning divorce, child custody and inheritance matters instead of the Islamic courts. While the laws governing Shari'a are not fully abolished, the Muslim minority in Thrace is now presented with alternative choices.¹⁰

At the beginning of March 2018, 2,000 protesters gathered before parliament to voice their disapproval of new schoolbooks, which were less partial to the GOC and presented other religious groups more neutrally. According to World Religion News, some signs carried by demonstrators bore inscriptions against the authors of the textbooks, describing them as traitors to Greece. Others wrote: "No to ecumenical religion." The protesters delivered their petition to parliament and disbanded peacefully.¹¹ Later that month (March), the Greek Council declared the changes made by former education minister Nikos Filis as unconstitutional. They allegedly violated article 16 of the constitution.¹²

Incidents

It is at times difficult to separate hate crimes based on ethnicity from those based on religion. According to a report by Aljazeera, the number of attacks on immigrants has increased over the last few years. It noted however that the far right Golden Dawn, which has been previously at the forefront of racially or religiously motivated violence, scaled

down its attacks. The author of the article links this decline to the ongoing court trials of some members of the organisation, who were arrested in previous years.¹³

According to an article in the National Catholic Reporter, the relationship between the Orthodox and Catholic communities is often better on the islands than on the mainland and in the big cities. The article also points out the economic hardship of Catholic parishes, which do not receive the same state support as the GOC and which have been hit hard by tax rises in recent years.¹⁴

A step forward for religious freedom came when Pope Francis paid a short visit to the island of Lesbos in April 2016. The atmosphere was calm as compared with the hostility Pope Saint John Paul II encountered during his visit in 2001. Pope Francis has been invited by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to come together in a display of Christian unity on the refugee question.¹⁵

Prospects for freedom of religion

In the long term, the situation has improved as compared with several years ago, but the changes have occurred only slowly. It has to be noted, however, that the general trend is in the right direction. There are efforts to improve the level of religious freedom in the country. Then again, the ongoing refugee crisis which hit Greece especially hard, poses a great challenge. Acts of intolerance against Muslims are on the rise, but the relevant authorities remain ready to impose the law.

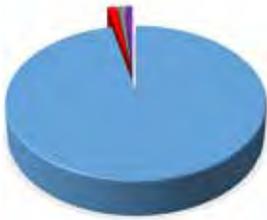
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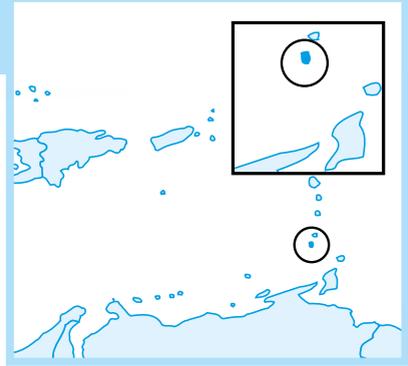
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GRENADA

RELIGION



- Christians: 96,6%
- Spiritists: 1,3%
- Agnostics: 1%
- Others: 1,1%



AREA
345km²

POPULATION
107.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the constitution¹ states that the nation is based on principles that recognise the “fatherhood and supremacy of God and man’s duties to his fellow man”. It also recognises that, “inasmuch as spiritual development is of supreme importance to human existence, and the highest expression thereof, it is their aspiration to serve that end”. It “firmly believes in the dignity of human values and that all men are endowed by the Creator with equal and inalienable rights, reason and conscience”.

The constitution guarantees the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of each person, such as – among others – freedom of conscience, expression and association, without distinction of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex, subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the public interest.²

No person should be hindered in the enjoyment of his or her freedom of conscience, including freedom of thought, religion, freedom to change religion or belief, and to manifest and propagate his or her belief, whether in worship, teaching, practice and observance, individually or collectively, in public or in private.³ Conscientious objection to military service is also recognised.⁴

Except with one’s consent (or that of one’s guardian for minors under the age of 18), no person attending an educational establishment can be obliged to receive religious instruction or take part in or attend a religious ceremony that is not of their religion.⁵ Every religious community has the right to set up and maintain its own educational facilities and will not be prevented or hindered from providing religious instruction to their members, whether or not they receive government subsidies.⁶ The government funds public schools run by Christian (Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Adventist, Mennonite) groups; however, funding is not limited to them. Students are not required to attend religion classes.⁷

No person shall be obliged to take an oath against their beliefs or in a manner that is contrary to their religion or belief.⁸ No law may be discriminatory in itself or in its effects, where discrimination means different treatment of persons by reason of their sex, race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed or sexual orientation.⁹

Certain types of religious headdress are allowed in photographs for national identity papers, provided the face is visible.¹⁰

Religious groups can obtain exemptions from taxes and customs if they are recognised as non-profit organisations and register with the Corporate Affairs and Intellectual Property Office (CAIPO), providing information about the group's organisation, directors, place of operation and nature of their activities. They must also send a request to the Ministry of Finance.¹¹

Foreign missionaries must pay for a worker's permit or get a waiver from the Ministry of Labour. They must show previous experience and be sponsored by a registered religious organisation.¹²

Matters relating to religious organisations are handled by the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Religious Affairs.¹³

Incidents

In November 2016, a referendum was held to decide on seven separate changes to the constitution.¹⁴ One proposed amendment sought to increase fundamental rights and freedoms, by expanding what constitutes discrimination to include disability, ethnicity, language, social class and religion.¹⁵ It also included a guarantee of gender equality so that men and women have equal rights and status in all spheres of life. To accept the changes, a two-thirds majority was required. All proposed amendments were rejected.¹⁶

There were no reports from churches, official government media, or local media, of any intolerance, discrimination or persecution on religious grounds.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Prospects for freedom of religion in Granada are good. With respect to the period under review, there were no reported incidents of intolerance, which, compared to the 2016 report, allows us to conclude that the situation of religious freedom has not changed.

Endnotes

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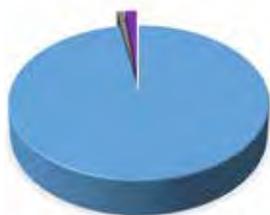
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GUATEMALA

RELIGION



- Christians: 97,3%
- Agnostics: 1%
- Others: 1.7%



AREA	POPULATION
108.889km ²	16.673.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala states that the constitution is made “invoking the name of God”.¹ Under article 36, “the exercise of all the religions is free. Any person has the right to practise his religion or belief, in public and in private, through teaching, cult and observance, without other limits than the public order and the due respect for the dignity of the hierarchy and the faithful of other beliefs.”

Article 37 of the constitution gives legal recognition to the Catholic Church. It also acknowledges the ownership of the Catholic Church over “real assets it holds peacefully for its own purposes, as long as they have formed part of the patrimony of the Catholic Church in the past”. Also under article 37, other Churches or religious entities can obtain legal recognition “in accordance with the rules of their institution, and the Government may not deny it, aside from reasons of public order”. Article 37 also states: “The real assets of the religious entities assigned to cult, to education and to social assistance enjoy exemption from taxes, assessments and contributions.”

Under articles 186,197 and 207, ministers of religion cannot assume the offices of president, vice president, or cabinet minister; nor can they be magistrates or judges.

According to article 71, the state undertakes to provide education “without any discrimination whatsoever”. Under article 73, “religious education is optional in the official establishments and can be taught during ordinary hours, without any discrimination.” Likewise, the state undertakes to “contribute to the maintenance of religious education without any discrimination”.

Under the Civil Code, churches which are legal persons are entitled to acquire, possess and dispose of goods, provided that the latter are destined exclusively to religious purposes, social assistance or education.²

Under the Labour Code, discrimination on the basis of religion is prohibited in establishments engaged in social welfare, education, culture, entertainment or commerce. Employers are not allowed to influence the religious convictions of their employees. Trade unions can be dissolved if it can be proven in a court of law that they cause or foment religious strife.³

The Penal Code imposes criminal sanctions for anyone who disrupts religious celebrations or who carries out acts that offend religious practices and objects of worship or who desecrates places of worship or burial. Theft is subject to more stringent criminal penalties if the objects stolen are used for worship or otherwise have high religious significance.⁴

Incidents

In July 2016, members of the Intercultural and Inter-religious Cooperation Committee of Guatemala took part in an inter-religious forum at the School of Catholic Youth Leaders, to learn more about other religions and forms of spirituality.⁵

In September 2016, after prosecutors and police forced their way into the buildings of the Ultra-Orthodox Lev Tahor Jewish community in Guatemala City, the community moved to Santa Rosa. The authorities explained that the operation was carried out at the request of the Government of Israel, which was seeking a girl who had not been authorised to leave the country. The community believed that the action represented a form of harassment against them because of their beliefs. In 2014, they had been expelled from the Guatemalan town of San Juan de La Laguna.⁶ Then, in April 2017, a court in the Department of Sololá sentenced the former mayor of the municipality of San Juan La Laguna to one year in prison for the crime of coercion because he had ordered that expulsion.⁷ Also in April 2017, an Israeli Court ruled that the Lev Tahor sect in Guatemala was a “dangerous cult” that abuses children.⁸

In February 2017 the country’s Mayan community celebrated the arrival of the New Year.⁹

In February 2017 the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Guatemala expressed concern over the arrival of a Dutch boat, “Women on Waves”, which sails around the world to perform abortions in countries where the practice is illegal. The bishops also expressed their support for the government for “protecting and upholding the country’s laws”.¹⁰

In August 2017 a Salvadoran priest, Father Juan Carlos Mendoza Alfaro, was murdered in Yupiltepeque, Guatemala. According to the authorities, he was intercepted by a group of armed men as he made his way to his assigned parish, and, despite identifying himself as a man of the Church, he was attacked and killed.¹¹

In March 2017 Comptroller General Carlos Mencos publicly urged a mayor not to continue with the construction of a Catholic church in the village of La Tremendita. The reason he gave is that under to the constitution, Guatemala is a secular state, and so public resources cannot be spent on religious projects. For the comptroller, allocating funds to the construction of churches generates conflict in the country, which is home to various religions.¹²

In April 2017 the Intercultural and Inter-religious Cooperation Committee of Guatemala met to pray. Each of its members prayed according to their distinct Mayan, Muslim, Buddhist, Bahá’í or Christian beliefs to honour the legacy of Monsignor Juan José Gerardi, who had been murdered in April 1998.¹³

In November 2017 the Ahmadi Muslim Community of Guatemala held its annual convention. The Ahmadi Muslims invited members of other religious confessions, including the Catholic, Evangelical and Mormon Churches.¹⁴

In January 2018 the Catholic Church expressed concerns and criticised the state for the way it was dealing with the critical political and socioeconomic situation of the country, which “lives under the dictatorship of corruption”.¹⁵ In February 2018, Archbishop Óscar Julio Vián, who had criticised the political system and corruption, died from cancer. The government ordered three days of mourning.¹⁶

In February 2018 police received reports about attempts to extort large sums of money from members of the San Cristóbal Church in Palín. As a result of the threats made, some processions planned for Lent and Holy Week were called off. The Church had received threats years before, but after filing complaints, things had gone back to normal.¹⁷ In the same month, someone started a fire in the parish church of San Juan Bautista de Amatitlán, which was built in 1665. The blaze caused damage to the bell tower and the cellar, at an estimated cost of 15,000 quetzals (about US\$ 2,000).¹⁸ The culprit was arrested by the authorities.¹⁹

In February 2018 Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales met with representatives of the Jewish and Evangelical communities at the National Palace of Culture.²⁰

In March 2018 an international conference entitled “Religious Freedom, Secular State and Conscientious Objection” was held, sponsored by Brigham Young University, the La Familia Importa (Family Matters) Association and Manos mormonas que ayudan (Helping Mormon Hands), with the participation of scholars, religious leaders and government officials. The Human Rights Ombudsman, Jordán Rodas, offered words of welcome and was supportive of the right to conscientious objection.²¹

In March 2018 the La Familia Importa Association filed a complaint against Jordán Rodas, the country’s Human Rights Ombudsman, for “disturbing acts of worship” because of his participation in a march on International Women’s Day. During the march, a group of women parodied the Virgin Mary in a mock procession that included a “powerful vulva”. The prosecutor was asked to appear before the country’s Congress.²²

Prospects for freedom of religion

In the period under review, there were no significant violations of the right to the freedom of religion, and the authorities acted on concerns raised by religious groups. As the country’s political crisis continues, various religious denominations continue to take part in activities that facilitate interfaith dialogue. The constitutional recognition of the Catholic Church puts the Church in a position that is noticeably different from that of other religious groups in the country.

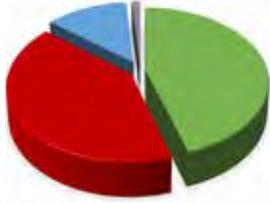
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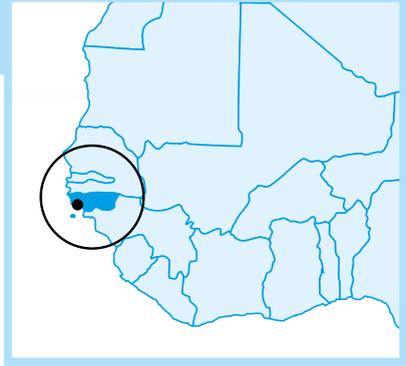
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GUINEA BISSAU

RELIGION



- Muslims: 45,3%
- Ethnoreligionists: 40,7%
- Christians: 12,7%
- Agnostics: 1,2%
- Others: 0,1%



AREA	POPULATION
36.125km ²	1.888.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Guinea-Bissau is a country of broad religious diversity, resulting from its wide ethnic mix of people.¹ According to Article 6 of the constitution, Guinea-Bissau is a strictly secular state.² Article 4 prohibits political parties from identifying with any particular Church, religion, cult, or religious doctrine. The right to freedom of religion is enshrined in law and enjoys the protection of the state. Religious communities require licences, but there are no known cases in which registration has been denied.³

In the former Portuguese colony – which upholds the separation of Church and state – religious instruction is not provided in public schools.⁴ However, religious communities can offer it themselves. The state intervenes only if this instruction is in violation of the country’s laws. Despite political instability and widespread poverty, there have been few religious tensions in recent decades.

Incidents

There was no significant change with regard to religious freedom during the reporting period. That said, the country faces other problems that could have a negative influence on religious life. The fight against drug smuggling from Latin America also poses huge problems for the country.⁵ More and more people, including many children, are fleeing poverty by emigrating to neighbouring countries such as Senegal.⁶ In early 2017, against a backdrop of a tense economic situation, there were increasing public demonstrations against the government of President José Mário Vaz. The United Nations and other international stakeholders working to promote peace-building activities in Guinea-Bissau have expressed concern over growing political and social tensions in the country.⁷

Although religious freedom is guaranteed by law in Guinea-Bissau, it is under threat on several fronts. On 10th November 2014, while Guinea-Bissau’s Catholic bishops were in Rome for their “ad limina” visit along with bishops from Senegal, Mauritania and Cape Verde, Pope Francis declared: “[T]oday [faith] is threatened in many ways, whether by religious proposals that are easier and more attractive on the moral plane which are

appearing from every side, or by the phenomenon of secularisation which also concerns African societies.”⁸ Pope Francis recommended that local Churches provide “lay people [with]... a sound doctrinal and spiritual formation” and “constant support”. He called on them to “prevent the faith from becoming marginalised [from] public life”.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Extremist Islam is on the rise in West Africa, threatening peace in much of the region during the period under review. It remains to be seen if this will undermine inter-faith relations in Guinea-Bissau but this is possible given that it and other poverty-stricken countries are particularly susceptible to jihadism. Foreign extremist imams are reported to be active in the country’s mosques.⁹

Endnotes

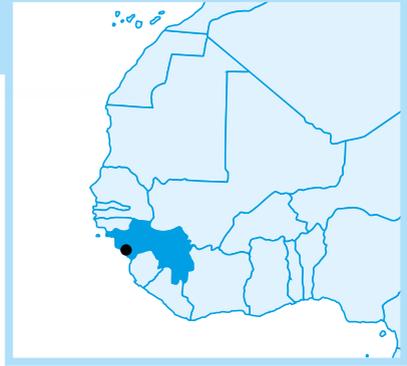
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GUINEA CONAKRY

RELIGION



- Muslims: 87,2%
- Ethnoreligionists: 9%
- Christians: 3,5%
- Others: 0,3%



AREA	POPULATION
245.857km ²	12.947.162

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The laws of the country provide for full religious freedom including the right to choose one's religion and to convert to another religion.¹ Guinea Conakry has great ethnic and religious diversity, and in practice these rights are generally respected, although the government has authoritarian tendencies. After more than 50 years of autocratic rule under President Sekou Touré (1958-84) and Lansana Conté (1984-2008) and a number of short-lived transitional regimes, Guinea held its first largely free presidential elections in 2010. In October 2015, President Alpha Condé achieved almost 58 percent of the vote and was re-elected for a second and final five-year term.

Muslims are the majority population in all regions of the country. Christian communities are located particularly in the larger cities as well as in the south and east of the country. The country is also home to small groups of Bahá'í, Hindus and Buddhists.

Religious coexistence is traditionally good in Guinea. To date, Islamic fundamentalism has had little support in Guinea.² The attitude of local Muslims towards other religions has traditionally been relatively moderate. An interfaith council works closely with the government on religious affairs.³

Religious communities must register with the Secretariat of Religious Affairs (SRA). Each registered faith group must report on its activities every six months. Registered groups receive tax exemptions and energy grants. There were no reports of major difficulties in this regard during the reporting period.⁴

Religious communities cannot own radio or television stations, but they can broadcast religious programmes on state-run television channels.⁵ These include broadcasting Muslim Friday prayers, Islamic religious instruction, and Sunday Christian worship services.

The SRA has inspectors throughout the country who monitor religious worship including homilies. Topics for weekly sermons are set and religious communities are monitored for compliance.⁶

In the field of education, there is a strict separation between state and religion. According to the official curriculum, there is no religious instruction. But there are many private

schools in the country, run by both Muslim and Christian religious communities, and many of these also receive support from local authorities.

Incidents

The SRA provides assistance to religious pilgrims. During the Ebola epidemic of 2014-2015, however, 10,000 Muslim pilgrims who had received assistance were not able to travel to Mecca, as they were denied entry to Saudi Arabia as a result of the epidemic. Since then, pilgrims from Guinea have been allowed to travel to Mecca once again.⁷ During the reporting period, the state contributed some US\$ 3.4 million to pay the cost of the pilgrimage for 6,000 Guineans.⁸

The government now also subsidises Christians to go on pilgrimage to Europe and the Holy Land. Around US\$ 217,000 was spent for travel expenses in 2016, compared to US\$ 325,000 in 2015. The grants are now set to be provided to different Christian denominations on a rotating basis.⁹

Relationships between the various religious communities in the country are essentially good.

As in other countries of West Africa, the spread of jihadist Islamism is a source of concern for many people in Guinea as well. The government closed a mosque near the international airport in Conakry, stating that this was a preventive measure in the wake of jihadist terror attacks in neighbouring countries.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Guinea is recovering from the Ebola epidemic that broke out in the spring of 2014, paralysing the country.¹¹ The epidemics caused great harm to some religious communities; families were destroyed and village communities torn apart.

The country has high levels of crime and corruption and it has become a hub for drug trafficking in West Africa.¹²

Prospects for freedom of religion

The consequences for Guinea of the spread of jihadism in West Africa remain to be seen. Thus far, the country – which has a long tradition of peaceful coexistence among religions – has successfully managed to defend itself against jihadist groups. An encouraging sign for stability is that the judiciary is responsive to complaints of intolerance.

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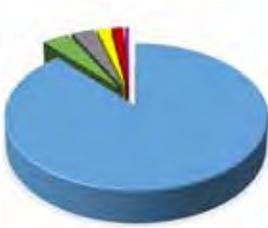
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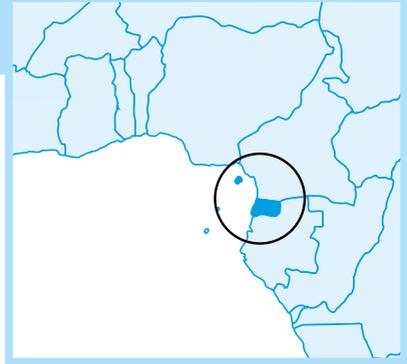
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EQUATORIAL GUINEEA

RELIGION



● Christians: 88,5%
● Muslims: 4%
● Agnostics: 3,3%
● Atheists: 1,9%
● Ethnoreligionists: 1,7%
● Others: 0,6%



AREA 28.052km ²	POPULATION 870.000
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Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 13 of the constitution, (adopted in 1995 and amended most recently in the new constitution which was approved by a referendum in 2011) guarantees freedom “of religion and worship,” while article 15 states that “all discriminatory acts committed on the basis of tribal affiliation, sex, or religion” are “punishable by law.” Article 23 adds that “the State guarantees every person, private organisation or religious community the right to establish schools,” provided that they respect the official syllabus. The same article also permits the free choice of religious instruction “on the basis of freedom of conscience.”¹ This provision is confirmed by the law, which states that every individual is free to study his or her religion and should not be forced to follow another religion without consent.

In state schools, the study of religion is optional and may be replaced by a course in civil or social education. As article 9 of the constitution makes clear, religion is not permitted as a defining policy of political parties.

A 1991 law, which, in the following year, was confirmed in a presidential decree, sets out the norms for the registration of religious groups and for officially sanctioned preferential treatment towards the Catholic Church and the Reformed Church of Equatorial Guinea – neither of which is required to obtain state registration. Also, in October 2013 the government of Equatorial Guinea and the Holy See signed a concordat. This preferential treatment is demonstrated, in practice, by the inclusion of the Catholic Mass in all official ceremonies, particularly during celebrations of the anniversary of the 1979 coup d'état, on Independence Day and on the President's birthday.

Other religious groups are required to register through a written request to the ministry of justice, religious worship and prisons. The evaluation of this request is entrusted to the director-general of this ministry. Some religious groups, such as Muslims or Baha'i, need register only once. Some other, newer denominations may be required to renew their registration periodically. Unregistered groups can be fined or disbanded. In practice the registration process is extremely slow – in some cases it can take a number of years – but this appears to be because of the local bureaucracy rather than because of any explicit political decision to target any particular religious group.

A Ministry of Justice, Religious Affairs and Prisons decree, published on 4th April 2015, specifies that any religious activities taking place outside the hours of 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. or outside of registered places of worship require permission from the ministry. The decree prohibits religious acts or preaching within private residences and requires foreign religious representatives or authorities to obtain advance permission from the ministry in order to participate in religious activities.²

Incidents

The Catholic Church continues to enjoy preferential treatment by the government. A baptismal certificate is often accepted as an official identity document by state officials. Catholic Masses continue to be a regular feature of all major ceremonial services, such as National Day on 12th October and the President's birthday on 5th June. Catholic religious ceremonies and buildings³ are often funded by the President. For instance, on 28th May 2017, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema inaugurated a publicly-funded Catholic church, Our Lady of Bisila, situated on Pico Basilé, a mountain overlooking the capital, Malabo.⁴ On 20th May 2017, three new Catholic bishops were consecrated in Mongomo during a ceremony paid for with public funds.⁵

Non-Catholic public officials continue to report that they are put under pressure to take part in religious activities, including attending Catholic Masses.⁶

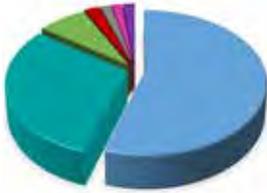
Prospects for freedom of religion

During the reporting period, freedom of religion neither improved nor worsened. The situation remained stable, a trend that is likely to continue.

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RELIGION



- Christians: 54,8%
- Hindus: 30,2%
- Muslims: 7,6%
- Ethnoreligionists: 2,3%
- Agnostics: 1,6%
- Baha'is: 1,6%,
- Others: 1,9%



AREA	POPULATION
214.969km ²	771.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution states that Guyana is a secular state.¹ Freedom of conscience is guaranteed, including freedom of thought and religion, freedom to change one's religion or belief, to manifest it and propagate it through worship, teaching, practice and observance, either individually or collectively, in public or in private.² Conscientious objection to military service is also recognised.³

No religious community can be prevented from providing religious instruction to its members.⁴ Except with one's consent (or that of one's guardian for people under 18), no person attending a place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend a religious ceremony or observance other than their own.⁵

No one can be forced to take an oath contrary to their religion or beliefs, or in a manner contrary to their religion.⁶ No law may be discriminatory in itself or in its effects, where discrimination means the different treatment of people based on their race, place of origin, political opinion, colour or creed.⁷

The functions of the Ethnic Relations Commission include encouraging and creating respect for religion, culture and other forms of diversity typical of a plural society.⁸

There is no official registry of religious groups, but they must follow the registration procedures of non-profit organisations to obtain formal recognition.⁹ Proper registration requires submitting a group's name, the address of its place of worship and information about its leaders. Once formally recognised, groups can conduct financial operations, acquire properties and benefit from tax exemptions. To enter the country, foreign missionaries need the authorisation of the Ministry of Citizenship. In Amerindian villages, foreign religious groups need the permission of the local council. There is no religious education in state schools. Religious education is compulsory in private schools that are affiliated to a specific religion.¹⁰

Incidents

As in the 2014-2016 period, there have been no reported incidents of religious intolerance for the period under review. Thus, nothing has changed in this regard. On the contrary, numerous concrete actions have been undertaken to seek greater harmony among Guyana's various religious groups, the largest of which are Christians and Hindus. Here are some examples of that:

In January 2017, Social Cohesion Minister Dr George Norton met with representatives of the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana, the African Cultural and Development Association, the (Hindu) Viraat Sabha Organisation, the Guyana Rastafarian Association and the Guyana Islamic Trust "to ensure continuity and increased areas of collaboration as part of advancing the social cohesion agenda".¹¹

In February 2017, in the context of the UN-promoted World Interfaith Harmony Week, Guyanese President David Granger announced that social cohesion is "an important part of his government" and that interfaith harmony encourages a culture of cooperation to tackle conflicts. He stated that Guyana is a model of interfaith harmony, a cosmopolitan state where most people belong to one of the world's three major religions: Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. In July of the same year, in a meeting with the Muslim community, the president stressed that the country is an "oasis of religious tolerance", noting that the three major religions have actively contributed to the creation of an "atmosphere of tranquillity and harmony".¹³

Prospects for freedom of religion

Prospects for freedom of religion in Guyana are good, given the absence of incidents that undermine it and the explicit concern of the government for social cohesion. The authorities view positively the influence of religions and recognise their contribution to a climate of social peace.

Endnotes

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HAITI

RELIGION



- Christians: 94,2%
- Agnostics: 2,7%
- Spiritists: 2,7%
- Others: 0,4%



AREA

27.750km²

POPULATION

10.848.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution¹ stipulates that all religions and beliefs shall be exercised freely. Article 30 states that everyone has the right to profess their religion and practise their faith, provided that the exercise of this right does not interfere with public order and peace.

Article 30-1 states that no one can be forced to belong to a religious organisation or follow any teaching that is contrary to their beliefs.

The law sets the conditions for the recognition and practice of religions and faiths, set out in article 30-2.

Labour unions are essentially non-political, non-profit and non-denominational, according to article 35-4.

Foreign nationals and religious, humanitarian or educational institutions are guaranteed under article 55-2 the right to own private property.

As stipulated in article 135-1, in taking the oath of office, the President of the Republic must say: "I swear before God and the Nation ..." In accordance with article 187, members of the High Court of Justice must also say: "I swear before God and before the Nation to judge with the impartiality and the firmness appropriate to an honest and free man, according to my conscience and my deep-seated conviction."

As set out in article 215, centres of African belief are regarded as part of the nation's heritage and protected by the state.

Although Roman Catholicism is not the official religion, a concordat was signed with the Holy See in 1860 and amended in 1984. Under its terms, the Government of Haiti provides economic support for Catholic priests, churches and schools.²

The law regulates the recognition and operation of religious groups. The Bureau of Worship registers churches, members of the clergy and missionaries of the various confessions. Religious groups that register can have their marriage and baptisms recognised in civil law. They also enjoy some tax exemptions but must submit an annual report of their activities.³

Vodou worship centres and practises are recognised but marriages performed by Vodou priests are not recognised in civil law. Islam too is not recognised; thus, Islamic marriages cannot be registered civilly.⁴

In October 2017, three Haitian senators travelled to Benin, a small African nation, on a research trip as part of a plan to reform the country's Penal Code, which dates back to 19th century.⁵ In both nations, part of the population adheres to spiritualistic beliefs. The goal is to modernise the code. The senators also wanted to see how a country can legislate in the area of crimes related to religion.⁶

Some Christian and Muslim groups operate informally, without seeking official recognition.⁷

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1976.⁸

Incidents

In November 2016, a former Haitian senator, a Muslim, said that he met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship. He and his fellow Muslims are still waiting for an answer to the request for official registration of the Muslim religion.⁹

Prospects for freedom of religion

The socio-political condition of Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, continues to be a source of concern. After the political crisis of 2015, when elections were cancelled as a result of accusations of fraud, Haitians elected new leaders in November 2016. This came shortly after Hurricane Matthew, which hit the country in October 2016, worsening a bad situation caused by the 2010 earthquake.¹⁰ Since then, Catholic Church organisations have continued to hand out basic aid to the victims – food and hygiene products – collected by parishes and dioceses.¹¹

It is probable that the lack of overt incidents of intolerance or religious discrimination might stem from the state of precariousness in which the population lives due to natural disasters. As in the previous period, Islam, which has not yet received any official recognition, ostensibly continues to be discriminated against.

In the case of Vodou believers, although they are registered, their marriage and baptism ceremonies are not recognised. Thus, no greater recognition has been granted to minority religions. For Haiti, offering the same legal treatment to all religious confessions remains a challenge.

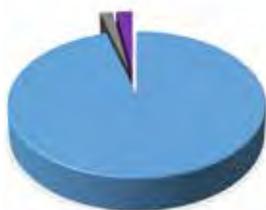
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HONDURAS

RELIGION



- Christians: 95,7%
- Agnostics: 1,9%
- Others: 2,4%



AREA	POPULATION
112.492km ²	8.190.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution¹ invokes the protection of God in its preamble and guarantees the free exercise of all religions and faiths without preference insofar as they do not break any laws or violate public order. This right cannot be suspended or restricted in case of emergencies.

Members of the clergy cannot, according to article 77, hold public office or engage in propaganda invoking religious motives or using the religious beliefs of the people.

In articles 78 and 79, freedom of association and assembly are guaranteed as long as they do not violate public order and public morals.

Registration of religious groups is not required. The Catholic Church is the only Church that has been legally recognised in law. Unregistered organisations can operate but do not receive tax exemptions or other benefits. To obtain legal recognition, religious groups must apply to the Secretariat of State for Human Rights, Justice, Governance and Decentralisation. The Office of the Solicitor General must review the application. Authorised organisations must submit annual reports about their financial situation and activities. They can also ask the Ministry of Finance for tax exemption status.²

Foreign missionaries must have entry and residence permits and a sponsoring institution. The government has signed agreements with the Evangelical Fraternity of Honduras, Mormons and Seventh-day Adventists to facilitate the entry and residence of their missionaries. Groups that do not have written agreements must provide proof of employment and income for their missionaries. The immigration of foreign missionaries who use witchcraft or satanic rituals is prohibited.³

Honduras is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as the Ibero-American Convention on Young People's Rights, which recognises the right to conscientious objection in case of compulsory military service.⁴

Religious groups have criticised the government for not recognising marriages celebrated without a certificate of civil marriage. According to article 13 of the family code, any member of the clergy of whatever faith group who authorises a religious marriage without a civil marriage certificate will be held criminally liable.⁵

Seventh-day Adventists have pointed out that certain educational establishments (schools and universities) do not respect their right to observe the Sabbath, despite the fact that the Ministry of Education exempted them in 2014 from attending classes and taking exams on that day. Jehovah's Witnesses have said that some educational establishments require them to participate in patriotic activities that are contrary to their faith and some hospital establishments refuse to treat them because of their refusal to receive blood transfusions. Some Muslims have expressed concern that Muslim women were not allowed to wear the hijab in certain government jobs. According to some reports, private lawyers were allowed to wear the hijab in court.⁶

As for the Armed Forces, the commanders of military bases prefer Catholic or Protestant chaplains.⁷

Members of the clergy authorised to minister in the country are not required to make a statement in relation to confidential information or secrets heard during the exercise of their ministry and which they are required not to divulge. Article 228 of the Code of Criminal Procedure states that before any statement, they must be informed of their right not to speak and if they do, they have the right not to answer.⁸

In May 2017, the government invited the Churches to take part in discussions about possibly reducing the age at which a person is punishable and reorganising of the juvenile criminal justice system.⁹ In light of the high crime rate, such a measure would have a significant impact on society.

In December 2017, the Catholic and Evangelical Churches came together to call on the population to stop acts of violence and demonstrate peacefully. They went on to call on political leaders to initiate talks to resolve the country's difficulties.¹⁰ The Chamber of Commerce and Industries of Cortés (CCIC)¹¹ suggested asking the leaders of the Evangelical and the Catholic Church of Honduras to act as mediators in a national dialogue aimed at ending the political crisis.¹²

Incidents

In January 2018, the Church of Santa María de los Dolores was almost set ablaze by unknown individuals apparently under the influence of alcohol. It is unclear if the perpetrators wanted to burn the church or if it was an accident caused by cigarette butts thrown at the church door building.¹³

Prospects for freedom of religion

Under Honduran law, a legally recognised Church and other religious organisations are regulated differently even though the latter can obtain legal status and access to tax exemptions. The demands of some religious minorities have not yet been heard or heeded, so the situation has remained the same. It must be noted that the government has invited the Churches to participate in a commission to reorganise the juvenile criminal

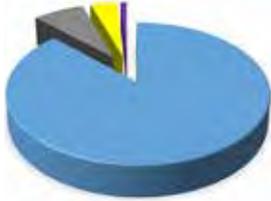
justice system. Similarly, civil society groups have called for the Churches to mediate in political conflicts. This would significantly increase the work of the Churches with the risk that churchmen and women might end up taking part in political discussions. At the same time, this represents a recognition of the important role they play in society. The prospects for freedom of religion remain unchanged, but it is important for religious leaders to maintain their rightful place in the community without getting into government-related matters.

Endnotes

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HUNGARY

RELIGION



- Christians: 87,5%
- Agnostics: 7,6%
- Atheists: 4%
- Others: 0,9%



AREA

93.024 km²

POPULATION

9.821.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble to the Hungarian constitution recognises the prominent place of Christianity in the history of the country, declaring: “We are proud that our king, Saint Stephen, built the Hungarian state on solid ground and made our country a part of Christian Europe 1,000 years ago.”¹ Provisions on freedom of religion or belief in the 2011 constitution were amended in 2016. Article seven enshrines the principle of religious freedom, drawing on Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.² Article seven goes on to establish separation of church and state while underlining the value to both of cooperating on “common goals”.³

In 1990, after the fall of the Iron Curtain and communism, Hungary adopted legislation guaranteeing the right of freedom of conscience and religion for all and prohibiting discrimination. In 2011 new legislation, called the “Church Act”⁴ deprived all but 14 of the previously legally registered religious communities and institutions of their legal status and put in place a new system to enable groups to regain legal status. To re-register, the applicants had to submit a document signed by a minimum of 1,000 individuals and to abide by several strict obligations. One condition was that it had to have been operating internationally for at least 100 years or in an organised manner as an association in Hungary for at least 20 years.⁵ The next step towards re-accessing church status was a two-thirds majority vote in the Hungarian Parliament. In the meantime, however, the de-registered churches were given another opportunity to re-apply for church status, perhaps as a result of international pressure. Parliament voted on this second round of applications in February 2012, registering another 13 churches alongside the initial 14.⁶

By February 2012, Parliament had denied the re-registration applications of 67 previously registered Churches without providing a substantive explanation for their denials despite the groups fulfilling all the conditions of the “Church Act”. These included Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches, as well as Buddhist and Hindu groups. They were thereby deprived of the right to the 1 percent of income tax which taxpayers may donate to Church.⁷

The only way for the other deregistered religious communities and institutions to be legally registered was to apply for the status of civic association or non-profit association.

However, they became second-rank associations losing tax exemptions, financial benefits and many of their rights, including maintaining schools and charitable organisations, running homeless shelters or owning agricultural lands.⁸

In February 2013, Hungary's constitutional court ruled that the de-registration of formerly recognised churches was unconstitutional and that the National Assembly was therefore obligated to adopt legislation allowing taxpayers to donate one percent of their income tax to any religious organisation of their choosing. A deadline for the adoption of such legislation was 31st December 2017.⁹ As of 1st May 2018, no such legislation had been enacted.

On 8th April 2014, the ECtHR ruled in the case of *Magyar Keresztény Mennonita Egyház and Others v. Hungary*, which was a pilot judgment used to address nine separate applications,¹⁰ that Hungary's "Church Act" violated Articles nine and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In its judgment, the Court stated: "[...] the state has a duty to remain neutral and impartial in exercising its regulatory power in the sphere of religious freedom and in its relations with different religions, denominations and beliefs. Facts demonstrating a failure by the authorities to remain neutral in the exercise of their powers in this domain must lead to the conclusion that the state interfered with the believers' freedom to manifest their religion within the meaning of article nine of the convention."¹¹

On this basis, the court ruled against the Hungarian Government, and in favour of the applicant religious denominations. It concluded that: "The court considers that there is a positive obligation incumbent on the state to put in place a system of recognition which facilitates the acquisition of legal personality by religious communities."¹² However, at the time of writing, the "Church Act" had still not been amended in line with the ECtHR judgement.¹³

Incidents

In spite of being in the news for a variety of public comments made in the run-up to the April 2018 general elections, there were no incidents in Hungary involving religious freedom violations during the period under review. This followed research of both national and international records and consultation with human rights advocacy groups, including the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, the Foundation for Action and Protection, and the Helsinki Committee.

In July 2017, the Jewish community criticised Mr Orbán's billboard campaign targeting Hungarian-born Holocaust survivor George Soros for using depictions identified with anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda.¹⁴

In response to the Holocaust movie *Son of Saul*, Előd Novák, an MP and Vice President of Jobbik, a far-right party, decried the so-called "Holocaust Industry" in a Facebook post dated 11th January 2017. He was then forced to resign his seat in Parliament on 31st

August 2017 but retained his Jobbik membership.¹⁵ Jobbik has long been associated with anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim propaganda.

During the parliamentary election campaign, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán claimed in February 2018 that Germany and Western Europe were being overtaken by Muslims and that Christianity was Europe's last hope.¹⁶

In an interview published in the German magazine Bild on 7th January 2018, Mr Orbán called asylum seekers and refugees "Muslim invaders" while defending his Government's decision to bar their entry and contest the EU sanctioned quotas.¹⁷

In 2017 László Toroczkai, Mayor of Asotthalom and Jobbik member, told the BBC: "...we are a white, European Christian nation; we want to stay ... like this." He went on to state that Muslims and gays were not welcome.¹⁸ That year, an 8-metre banner was suspended across the entrance to the Buda Tunnel that read "Islamisation kills".¹⁹

Prospects for freedom of religion

The "Church Act" adopted in 2011 will remain a source of discrimination as long as it is not amended along the lines of the ECtHR judgement in the case Magyar Keresztény Mennonita Egyház and Others v. Hungary. The two-thirds majority Parliamentary win by the incumbent party in the 8th April 2018 elections is likely to prolong the status quo.

Despite media claims that the country is a hotbed of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiment, there were no known physical acts of religious hatred. It demonstrates that there is a high level of tolerance and trust in society and that people are largely impervious to propaganda of this kind.

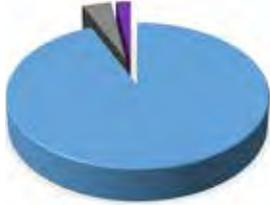
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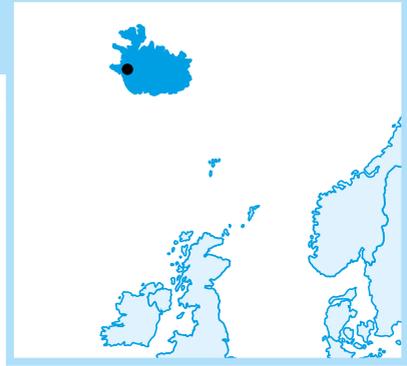
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ICELAND

RELIGION



- Christians: 93,5%
- Agnostics: 4,3%
- Others: 2,2%



AREA

103.000km²

POPULATION

332.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution establishes the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) as the national Church, and grants it state support and protection.¹ It guarantees people the right to form religious associations and to practise their religion in accordance with their beliefs. However, nothing may “be preached or practised which is prejudicial to good morals or public order”²

The constitution also provides that everyone is equal before the law, irrespective of religion,³ and no person “may lose any of his civil or national rights on account of his religion, nor may anyone refuse to perform any generally applicable civil duty on religious grounds”⁴

Religious groups and secular humanist organisations apply to a district commissioner’s office for recognition and registration and a four-member panel reviews the applications. Registered religious groups and secular humanist organisations receive state subsidies based on membership numbers.⁵

Every individual 16 years of age and older must pay a “Church tax” to the individual’s respective organisation.⁶ If there is no official affiliation, the tax is paid to the University of Iceland.⁷

Religious instruction on Christianity, ethics, and theology, guided by “the Christian heritage of Icelandic culture, equality, responsibility, concern, tolerance, and respect for human value” is compulsory in public and private schools. Parents may request an exemption for their children by submitting a written application.⁸

With respect to hate speech, the penal code prohibits publicly mocking, defaming, denigrating or threatening by comments or other expressions (such as pictures or symbols) a person or group for their religion.⁹

Incidents

In February 2018 lawmakers, backed with the support of over 400 doctors, proposed a law banning circumcision of boys for non-medical reasons. The bill calls the procedure

a violation of the rights of the child and draws a parallel with female genital mutilation, which is outlawed.

Jewish and Muslim religious leaders have called the legislation an attack on religious freedom. The president of the European Jewish Congress said: “We can only assume that this attempt to ban a core practice of Jewish communities comes from ignorance about the practice . . . rather than to send a message that Jews are no longer welcome in Iceland”. The imam of the Islamic Cultural Center of Iceland called the procedure, “deeply rooted in cultural and religious traditions”. The Bishop of the National Church of Iceland said the ban would “criminalise” Judaism and Islam in Iceland and such extreme measure should be avoided.¹⁰

The Hate Crime database reports two crimes motivated by anti-Muslim bias – one, a physical assault, and another, an attack on a place of worship.¹¹

A statue was destroyed outside a church in November 2016.¹² In January 2017, four churches in North Iceland were vandalised with antireligious slogans.¹³

Prospects for freedom of religion

In the period analysed, there have been no other reported incidents or negative developments with regard to religious freedom in Iceland. If the proposed legislation criminalising circumcision of boys passes, it may have a negative impact on the religious freedom of Muslims and Jews in Iceland.

Endnotes

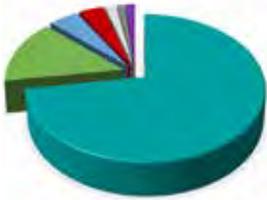
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INDIA

INDIA

RELIGION



● Hindus: 72,5%
● Muslims: 14,4%
● Christians: 4,7%
● Ethnoreligionists: 3,9%
● Sikhs: 1,8%
● Agnostics: 1,2%
● Others: 1,5%



AREA	POPULATION
3.287.263km ²	1.326.802.977

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

India does not have an official state religion and, according to the law, public institutions treat all religions on the same level. Nevertheless, notwithstanding this legal reality, the relative weight of the different religious communities that make up the population of India is an extremely sensitive political issue.

On 25th August 2015, the publication of data about the religious affiliation of the Indian population after the census carried out in 2010-2011¹ sparked lively discussions in the country.² Decrease in the proportion of Hindus, increase in the proportion of Muslims and stabilisation on the part of Christians are the main characteristics of India's religious landscape based on the census.³ The fact that Hindus have fallen below 80 percent has been the subject of much debate and comment. Right-wing Hindu nationalist movements saw the percentage as justification for their struggle for the Hindu character of the Indian nation. Representatives of religious minorities, for their part, have vigorously denounced the attacks to which they are regularly subjected.

Regardless of these demographic trends, India remains a democracy under its 1949 constitution. The federal constitution guarantees religious freedom. Article 25, paragraph one provides that every citizen has the right to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise and propagate their religion. In compliance with article 27, no one may be compelled to pay taxes intended for the promotion or financing of a particular religious denomination. Article 28 stipulates that no religious instruction shall be provided in schools wholly financed by the state; and pursuant to article 26, which concerns the rights of groups, each religious denomination or section of a religious denomination has the right to manage its religious affairs, to establish and manage religious and charitable institutions, and to possess, acquire and administer properties of all kinds. Article 29 states that citizens have the right to preserve their individual customs and languages. And, in conformity with article 30, religious and linguistic minorities have the right to set up and administer educational institutions of their choice.⁴

Under this federal constitutional framework, the central state does set certain limitations, especially concerning the relations of religious communities with foreigners. Consequently,

for many years now, the country has granted almost no missionary visas.⁵ Missionaries already in the country for several years can renew their residency and missionary permits on an annual basis, but it is exceptional for Indian authorities to grant visas to new missionaries. Likewise, the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act aims to control the funding from abroad of non-governmental organisations, and Christian or Muslim organisations regularly bear the consequences of this.⁶

From a legislative point of view, conversion is a highly controversial issue. The debate over the need for an anti-conversion law at the federal level goes back at least as far as 1978 and has always been linked to the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, BJP) and its predecessor, the Janata Party (People's Party).⁷ The leaders of the BJP advocate the ideology of Hindutva, according to which the Indian nation is in its essence Hindu. Recently, BJP ministers have repeatedly spoken out in favour of measures to "protect the Hindu religion", seemingly threatened by the rise of religious minorities, Muslims and Christians in particular. In December 2014, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs caused a sensation by calling for anti-conversion legislation at the federal level.⁸ On 23rd March 2015, Rajnath Singh, the Federal Minister of Home Affairs, called for a "national debate" on the issue and insisted on the need for an anti-conversion law at the national level.⁹ However, on 15th April 2015, the Federal Ministry of Law and Justice issued an opinion putting a stop to the federal government's wishes in the matter, on the grounds that a federal law would be unconstitutional.¹⁰

Nowadays, out of the 29 states (and seven territories) in the Indian Union, six have passed an anti-conversion law. Before the State of Gujarat, the legislative assemblies of Arunachal Pradesh, Orissa (Odisha), Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh had legislated in that respect. Later, Himachal Pradesh joined them, as did Tamil Nadu (but in the latter state located in the south of the country, where Christians are numerous, the law was quickly repealed). Each time, anti-conversion laws – which penalise conversions obtained by "force" or "fraudulent means" – were based on the notion of defence of "the public order", a domain under the responsibility of the states of the Indian Union.¹¹

For the opponents to a potential federal anti-conversion law, New Delhi's legislative plans are nevertheless worrying. This "clearly shows the mischievous intentions of the central government to cap the freedom of religion and freedom to follow a faith," said Navaid Hamid, secretary of the South Asian Council for Minorities.¹² According to Father Paul Thelakkat, spokesman for the Syrian-Malabar Catholic Church, there is no need for laws that restrict conversions in India, whether at the federal level or within the states. He says: "there are enough laws in this country to punish those who disturb public order or social harmony,"¹³ He adds: "The BJP supports the idea that the Hindu religion will not survive contact with other religions and that is why they try to build legislative defences to protect their own religion."¹⁴

Incidents

Quite often, sectarian or religious incidents occur at election time. For example in Uttar Pradesh, a state in the north of the country where the BJP won power in 2017, there were 96 attacks against Christians, compared to 39 incidents in 2016 when the ruling Samajwadi Socialist Party was in power.¹⁵ In Madhya Pradesh, a state run for 15 years by the BJP, 2017 saw a 54 percent increase in the number of incidents (52) compared to 2016.¹⁶ In Tamil Nadu, where there were 48 incidents, the increase was 60 percent.¹⁷

In May 2018, in Karnataka – a coastal state in southern India with a population of 64 million – the BJP made gains with the Congress Party remaining in power only after forming an alliance with a regional party. During the election campaign, a letter, allegedly from the Archbishop of Bangalore – actually a fake document – began circulating among people. It claimed that the Catholic Church was conspiring to split the Lingayats – an influential Hindu community that represents 17 percent of the state’s population – in order to carry out conversions in that community.¹⁸

At the national level, according to Persecution Relief, an ecumenical forum that focuses on anti-Christian persecution, 736 attacks were recorded in 2017 against 348 in 2016.¹⁹ Such incidents have been reported in 24 of India’s 29 states. Gathering in February 2018 for their biannual meeting, the 200 or so bishops of the three rites of the Catholic Church in India (Latin, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankar rites) did not hide the fact that in the current election season (parliamentary elections in eight states in 2018 and national elections in April or May 2019) Christians are facing “immense challenges.”²⁰ Since the BJP controls the governments of 19 of the 29 states of the Indian Union and is in power at the federal level, “groups and organisations wishing to promote cultural and religious nationalism are becoming bolder,”²¹ said Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas, Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India. But the bishops warned that nationalism based on culture or religion “would lead India on a path of self-destruction.”²²

This tendency is not denounced by the Catholic Church alone. On 25th April 2018, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) estimated that religious freedom in India was on a downward trend.²³ In addition to violence against Christians, the USCIRF also pointed to incidents, sometimes deadly, related to the slaughter of cattle. Measures to protect cows are increasing: in Rajasthan a “Cow Ministry” has been established and laws against the slaughter of cattle have been tightened; and, in Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s home state of Gujarat, the sentence for illegal slaughter of cows increased from seven years to life imprisonment. The gaushala – shelters for sacred cows – take on the appearance of temples for Hindu extremists. The consumption of beef has become the recurrent motive of violence between Hindu extremists and members of minorities. For Muslims and Christians as well as Tribal people and Dalits, beef is a cheap source of protein, but this puts them at risk of raids by the pro-Hindu militias who attack breeders, shippers and sellers of cattle. Between May 2015 and May 2017, violent attacks have killed twelve people.²⁴ Asserting the sacredness of the cow in Hinduism heralds the advent of a Hindu culture over the whole country.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Figures released by the Indian government and presented to Parliament on 6th February 2018 highlight the current upward trends in inter-religious violence: with respect to incidents of sectarian violence, 86 people were killed and 2,321 injured in 703 incidents in 2016, while 111 people were killed and 2,384 injured in 822 incidents in 2017.²⁵

Monsignor Thomas Menamparampil, former Catholic Archbishop of Guwahati in Assam, said that Narendra Modi and the BJP are well aware that the Hindu majority of the population is not united. However, the former archbishop added that the one way to unite the Hindu population is to present to them the Muslim and Christian minorities as threats to the identity of India; hence the polarisation of public opinion around the sacralisation of the cow and the repeated controversies over “forced conversions” blamed on Christians. Moreover, Narendra Modi’s important economic reforms lead to an “exclusive economy;” Archbishop Menamparampil is cited as saying in *Crux*.²⁶ “His big projects are for the benefit of the privileged few, of the elite that marginalises the weaker sections of society, fragile castes and tribes, whose lands are being given away to multinational corporations, mineral wealth from whose territories are being sold out to big money-bags with no benefit to indigenous communities;” the prelate said. While this “economy of exclusion” fits well with some aspects of Hindu nationalist ideology, an ideology based on caste affiliation and “communities that exclude each other;” political leaders are aware that in the long run, the lack of solidarity among Hindus is harmful to the interests of the ruling elite. According to the Archbishop, because the poorest members of Hindu society will never be convinced or impressed by the government’s achievements in economic matters, the government is trying to mobilise them by stressing the protection of the cow or even the prohibition of conversion in religious matters. In this context, Christians must be careful not to appear as a “contentious group” but should instead, as a minority, ensure the unity of society as a whole.

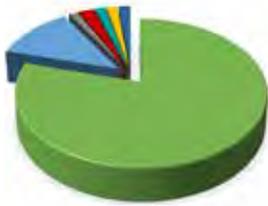
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INDONESIA

RELIGION



- Muslims: 79,3%
- Christians: 12,1%
- Agnostics: 1,3%
- Ethnoreligionists: 2,3%
- Hindus: 1,6%
- New Religionists: 1,6%
- Others: 1,8%



AREA	POPULATION
1.910.931 km ²	260.581.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, but it is not, constitutionally, an Islamic state. Instead, it is guided by its state ideology of "Pancasila". As described in the preamble to the constitution, this is based "on a belief in the One and Only God, just and civilised humanity, the unity of Indonesia, and democratic life led by wisdom of thoughts in deliberation amongst representatives of the people, and achieving social justice for all the people of Indonesia."¹ In other words, the constitution does not enforce any one particular religion, but it does require citizens to believe in a deity. Constitutionally, the rights of the followers of the six officially recognised religions – Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism – are protected, while the rights of adherents of other religions, including local traditional beliefs, and agnostics and atheists are not.

According to article 28E of the constitution, "Every person shall be free to choose and to practise the religion of his/her choice". Article 29 also states that: "The state guarantees all persons the freedom of worship, each according to his/her own religion or belief."

Blasphemy, heresy and religious defamation are banned under articles 156 and 156(a) of Indonesia's Criminal Code. This outlaws acts "expressing feelings of hostility, hatred or contempt against religions" and "insulting or offending a religion" and impose a maximum five-year prison term.² In addition to the Criminal Code, in 1965 President Sukarno signed Presidential Decree No. 1/PNPS/1965 on the Prevention of Blasphemy and Abuse of Religions, known as the "blasphemy law". Article one of this decree prohibits any "deviant interpretation" of religious teachings and mandates the president to dissolve any organisation practising such teachings.³

In 1969, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a joint ministerial decree, regulating the construction of places of worship. Following a review of the decree, in 2006 the Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister of Home Affairs No. 8 and 9/2006, released the "Guidelines for Regional Heads and Deputies in Maintaining Religious Harmony, Empowering Religious Harmony Forums and Constructing Houses of Worship".⁴ This requires that the local populous support new places of worship. It also requires the written recommendation of the district office of the

Ministry of Religious Affairs as well as the Religious Harmony Forum of the local district or city. The local mayor then has 90 days to decide on the application.

On 9th June 2008 the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Attorney General and the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a joint decree warning the Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia (JAI), Indonesian Ahmadi Muslims, and the general public against certain “interpretations and activities that are deviant from the principle teachings of Islam, that is the promulgation of beliefs that recognise a prophet with all the teachings who comes after the Prophet Mohammad.”⁵

The purpose of the decree was “to admonish and instruct all members of the public not to preach, advocate, or gather public support, in order to interpret a religion adhered to in Indonesia, or to perform religious activities resembling the activities of that religion, where those interpretations and activities deviate from the principles of that religion”.⁶ Ahmadis are instructed that “as long as they claim themselves to be Muslims, [they must] stop disseminating interpretations and [engage in] activities that deviate from the principles of the Islamic doctrine, namely the dissemination of the teaching that there is a prophet, with all his doctrines, after the Prophet Mohammad.”⁷

In August 2008, Indonesian authorities issued guidelines to implement the joint decree, specifying that it applied only to Ahmadis who claim to be Muslims, while those who do not “are exempted from the target of this admonition and order”.⁸ Banned activities include “speeches, lecturing, preaching, religious discussion, taking an oath of allegiance, seminars, workshops, and other activities either oral or written, in the form of books, organisation documents, printed media, and electronic media, containing and aimed at disseminating belief to acknowledge that there is a prophet with all his teachings after Prophet Mohammad.” Any violation is tantamount to an offence under article one against “deviant” interpretations and teachings of religion, article three of the 1965 Presidential Decree against Blasphemy and Abuse of Religions, and Article 156(a) of the country’s Criminal Code. Conviction carries of up to five years in prison.⁹

In addition to the blasphemy laws, the regulations on the construction of places of worship and the anti-Ahmadiyya guidelines, hundreds of local and regional laws and regulations have been promulgated over the past two decades. In recent years, the Pew Forum has consistently rated Indonesia as a country with one of the highest levels of restrictions on religion among the world’s 25 most populous nations, taking into account both government regulations and social hostilities.¹⁰ Dr Musdah Mulia, chairperson of the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace, claims there are at least 147 “discriminative laws and public policies in regards to religion”.¹¹ Indonesia does not have Shari’a law at a national level, but it is estimated that at least 52 of Indonesia’s 470 districts and municipalities have introduced over 78 Shari’a -inspired regulations.¹² Some experts say the figures are even higher, claiming there are at least 151 local Shari’a bylaws across Java, Sulawesi, Sumatra and West Nusa Tenggara.¹³

Incidents

Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, also known as “Ahok”, governor of Jakarta, a Christian, failed in his April 2017 re-election campaign. This happened after he was found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to two years in prison.¹⁴ On 27th September 2016 “Ahok quoted a Qur’anic verse while addressing concerns that Muslim voters were being discouraged from voting for a non-Muslim. Conservative Islamic groups and his political rivals seized on his remarks, especially after his statement went viral via a doctored YouTube video.¹⁵ The international community, including the United States, the European Union and the United Nations condemned Ahok’s imprisonment and called for reform or repeal of the blasphemy laws¹⁶.

Religious minorities in Indonesia have faced sporadic violence in recent years. Three churches in Indonesia’s second-largest city, Surabaya, were attacked on 13th May 2018 by suicide bombers, killing 13 people and injuring dozens.¹⁷ The attackers were believed to be from one family, alleged members of an Indonesian network, Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), inspired by the Daesh (ISIS). Santa Maria Catholic Church was attacked first by two young men believed to be brothers. The two, 16-year-old Firman Halim lahir and 18-year-old Yusuf Fadhil lahir, reportedly arrived on motorbikes and set off explosives. A woman and two girls, nine and 12 – Puji Kuswati lahir, Fadhila Sari lahir and Famela Rizqita – probably the mother and sisters of the men who attacked Santa Maria Catholic Church, blew themselves up at the Diponegoro Indonesian Christian Church. Last but not least, the Surabaya Centre Pentecostal Church was targeted by a car bomb, detonated by Dita Oepriarto lahir, believed to be the father and husband of the other attackers.

On 29th August 2016, St Joseph’s Catholic Church in Medan, North Sumatra, was attacked by a suicide bomber during Sunday Mass. As the priest read the Gospel, the bomber detonated a device, but it malfunctioned and only burned his hair. Armed with an axe and a knife, he ran towards the pulpit, but the priest fled down the aisle, pursued by the attacker. The priest suffered cuts to an arm but sustained no further injuries while members of the congregation were able to restrain the attacker until the police arrived.¹⁸

Some churches in Indonesia have been forced to close. Two of the most prominent cases involve the Indonesian Christian Church Yasmin in Bogor, West Java, and the Filadelfia Batak Church in Bekasi, a suburb of Jakarta, which remain closed despite rulings by the Supreme Court permitting their reopening.

Some pastors have had to flee Aceh Singkil due to death threats, including one who claimed that a price of 100 million Indonesian rupiah (US\$7,500) had been put on his head for anyone who captured him, dead or alive.¹⁹

The Ahmadiyya Muslim community also faces persecution. On 4th June 2017 the authorities in Depok City, a suburb of Jakarta, sealed the Ahmadiyya mosque, which the local mayor had ordered closed earlier in the year. The mosque was subsequently vandalised on 24th June by a mob who threw eggs and paint.²⁰ The National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) wrote to the mayor of Depok appealing his decision and proposing dialogue between the mayor and the Ahmadiyya community, but without success.²¹

The Ahmadiyya have faced sporadic outbreaks of violence in recent years, particularly in Cisalada, Cikeusik, Tasikmalaya and Lombok, along with the closure of their mosque in Bekasi.²² More than 200 Ahmadis remain internally displaced in Lombok after their homes were destroyed in an outbreak of violence in 2006.²³

Public harassment of the Shia community has also continued, although there have been no reported incidents of violence since the attacks against Shia Muslims in East Java in 2011 and 2012, which resulted in the displacement of 500 people. According to the US State Department's annual report on international religious freedom, more than 300 Shias from Madura remained displaced on the outskirts of Surabaya, East Java.²⁴

Other religious minorities also face violations of freedom of religion or belief. In particular, a spiritual group known as Gafatar, affiliated with Millah Abraham, a religious and social action movement that draws on the teachings of all the Abrahamic faiths, was banned by the government in 2016 and its leaders jailed for blasphemy in 2017.²⁵

In Tanjung, North Sumatra, an ethnic Chinese Buddhist woman was charged with blasphemy after asking the local Al Maksum Mosque to reduce the volume of its loudspeakers when broadcasting recorded Qur'anic readings.²⁶ On 29th July 2016, the woman, known as Meliana, asked the owner of a kiosk near the mosque to make this request, because her children were sick. She asked that the volume of Qur'anic recitations be turned down. The mosque agreed to her request, but when the story appeared on Facebook, it was misreported claiming that she had asked for the call to prayer, to stop. By midnight a mob responded by burning a Buddhist temple, a Chinese temple and a social care home. They also wanted to burn Meliana's home but neighbours intervened, concerned that their homes would also be set ablaze.

Several organisations, in particular the Setara Institute, the National Commission for Human Rights and the Wahid Foundation produce regular reports on the number of incidents of violations of freedom of religion. All reports indicate a steady increase in recent years, although the most recent report by the Setara Institute point to a decrease in 2017 compared with 2016. The Setara Institute reports 201 recorded incidents of religious intolerance in 2017, compared to 270 in 2016.²⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

Indonesia has a long tradition of pluralism and religious harmony, which could be restored if concerted, strong and appropriate action was taken by the authorities to stand up to the voices of intolerance and defend freedom of religion or belief in the country. If the authorities do not act, however, and if the voices of moderation within Islam and among human rights defenders and civil society groups are not heard, the potential for further extremism, intolerance and violations of freedom of religion can only increase. After its military defeat in Iraq and Syria, it is clear that Daesh is moving to South-East Asia, with Indonesia among its key areas of operation. If this continues, the country's religious minorities can only face growing dangers.

Endnotes

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RELIGION



- Muslims: 98,8%
- Others: 1,2%



AREA	POPULATION
1,628,750km ²	80.043.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Iran is a republic based on a theocratic constitution adopted after the Islamic Revolution that toppled the Shah in 1979. Article 12 of the constitution states that the Islamic school of Ja'fari Shiism is the official religion of the country. That said, article 13 recognises Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians as protected religious minorities with the right to worship freely and form religious societies.¹ Two seats in the Iranian parliament (Majlis) are reserved for Armenian Christians – the country's largest Christian minority (300,000), and one each for Assyrian Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians.²

The state comes under the authority of the Shia clergy, who rule through the Rahbar, the religious leader nominated for life by the Assembly of Experts – 86 theologians elected by the people for a term of eight years.³ The Rahbar presides over the Guardian Council of the constitution, a 12-member body (six appointed by the leader and six by the judiciary).⁴ The council exercises control over the laws and governing bodies of the state, including the presidency, whose office holder is elected by direct vote for a four-year term, renewable once.⁵

The primacy of Islam affects every sector of society. Non-Muslims are excluded from senior political and military positions. In addition, they may not serve in the judiciary, security services or as state-school principals. In Iran, one of the principal obstacles to full religious freedom is "apostasy". Conversion from Islam to another religion is not explicitly banned in the constitution but it is difficult because of the country's powerful Islamic traditions and the legal system founded on Islamic law. For all cases not mentioned explicitly in the Constitution, judges have the option, under article 167, to refer to "authoritative Islamic sources or authentic fatawa [fatwas]". In cases of apostasy sentences are based on Shari'a and fatwas and can be punished with the death penalty.⁶

The government enforces gender segregation throughout the country. Women of all religious groups are expected to respect the Islamic dress code in public, including covering their hair.⁷

Incidents

The Bahai community, the largest non-Muslim religious minority in Iran, is officially considered a heretical and “deviant sect” whose members are de facto apostates. Bahais are therefore the most severely persecuted religious minority in Iran. Not recognised by the state, they are denied political, economic, cultural, and religious rights.

Although ending religious discrimination was one of current President Rouhani’s campaign promises in the 2013 election, the amount of anti-Bahai propaganda in state media has increased. It is estimated that since 2014, around 26,000 anti-Bahai stories have appeared on official or semi-official media channels.⁸ In April 2017, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention stated that the imprisonment of 24 Iranian Bahais the previous year because their religious beliefs (“propaganda in favour of the Baha’i faith and against the Islamic Republic by being members of an illegal organisation”) constituted a “violation of their right as a religious minority.”⁹

On the 200th anniversary of the birth of the founder of the Bahai faith, in October 2017, almost 20 Bahais were arrested and 25 homes raided.¹⁰ Some reports indicate that over 90 Bahais are still held in prison because of their religious beliefs, including one of the seven Bahai leaders, collectively known as the “Friends of Iran” or Yaran, who oversaw the country’s community.¹¹ Three of them – Mahvash Sabet, Fariba Kamalabadi, and Behrouz Tavakkoli – were released in September, October, and December 2017 respectively after serving their 10-year sentences, following convictions based on false charges of espionage and spreading propaganda.¹² They were originally sentenced to 20 years in jail, but their sentences were reduced when the New Islamic Penal code was introduced in November 2015. Three others were released in early 2018. In February, Saeid Rezaie was set free, followed by the youngest and oldest of the leaders within a few days of each other in March: Vahid Tizfahm, 44, and Jamaloddin Khanjani, 85. This only left Afif Naeimi in prison at the end of the reporting period.¹³

While two Bahai instructors imprisoned for their work with the outlawed Bahai Institute for Higher Education were released from prison in 2017 after completing their 25-year sentence, five other instructors remain in prison. In November and December 2017, two more began prison sentences.¹⁴

Economic pressure has increased considerably on Iran’s Bahais. Over 600 shops have been closed since 2014.¹⁵ In several cases, the reason given was that they had ostensibly closed in observance of a Bahai religious holiday. Between April and October 2017, Iranian authorities closed down dozens of businesses for observing holy days. While some closures were temporary, many shops remain closed despite legal appeals. The president’s Special Assistant for Citizens’ Rights Shahindokht Molaverdi stated in November 2017 that the Rouhani administration would “follow legal procedures” to rectify the issue of closures.¹⁶

Concerning higher education, despite the Iranian government’s public declarations that universities are open to Bahais, its policy is to de facto prevent them from entering higher education.¹⁷ In spite of good academic results, more than 50 Bahai students have been reportedly expelled since 2013. In November 2017, three Bahai students, who complained

to the government because they were not allowed to enrol in university, were convicted of “membership in the anti-state Bahai cult” and given a five-year prison sentence.¹⁸ In late December 2017 Kashan University’s security office asked computer-science student Neda Eshraghi to confirm her Bahai faith in writing. They then confiscated her student ID, blocked her access to the university’s online facilities and banned her from student accommodation. Officials subsequently said that she had been expelled because of her Bahai faith.¹⁹

Soha Izadi was expelled from Zanjan University in March 2018. During examinations, she was summoned by the university’s training department which told her that the Education Evaluation Organisation’s ethics division had sent them a letter debaring her from her course. University officials told her that she could only continue her studies if she renounced her Bahai faith.²⁰

In September 2016, two brothers stabbed Farhang Amiri to death because he was Bahai and, in their view, an apostate.²¹ They later confessed that they thought that killing him would guarantee them a place in heaven.²² In July 2017, the eldest brother was sentenced to 11 years in prison and two years of internal exile for the murder. The other was given five-and-a-half years in prison. According to Iran’s penal code, the murder of a Muslim carries the death penalty, the murder of a Bahai or members of an unrecognised religion carries much lighter penalties.²³

According to a report by the UN’s Human Rights Council, Iranian Christians of Muslim background continue to face arbitrary arrest, harassment and detention. A common accusation against them is action or propaganda against the state.²⁴ They also risk prosecution for apostasy. The annual report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) mentions numerous incidents of Iranian officials raiding church services or threatening, arresting and imprisoning Church members, particularly converts to Evangelical Christianity.

During the period under review, government-controlled and pro-government media continued to spread anti-Christian messages, while anti-Christian content proliferated online and in print. Although Iranian authorities have raided house churches for decades and arrested hundreds of worshippers and Church leaders, the severity of the crackdown has increased in recent years.²⁵

Between May and August 2016, nearly 80 Christians were arrested. Although the majority were interrogated and released within days, some were held without charges for months, and several remain in detention or are awaiting trial because of their religious beliefs and activities.²⁶

In May 2016, four Christian converts²⁷ were arrested. As a result of their involvement in the house church movement, they were accused of acting against national security.²⁸ One of them, Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, previously served several years in prison following an apostasy conviction.²⁹ The other three, all men, were charged with drinking alcohol. They appealed their sentences of 80 lashes each. In June 2017, Pastor Nadarkhani was sentenced along with the three co-defendants to 10 years in prison because of their

house church activities. Nadarkhani received an additional two years of internal exile. In May 2018 they lost an appeal against their sentences.

In December 2016, Maryam Naghash Zargaran, a Christian convert from Islam, had at least six weeks added to her four-year sentence because of time spent outside prison for medical treatment. She went on hunger strike twice to protest against having been denied medical treatment for her chronic health problems.³⁰ In August 2017, she was released after completing her four-year prison sentence.³¹ However, she had to pay a 50-million Toman (over US\$14,000) fine for allegedly insulting staff at the prison's hospital. She also reportedly received a six-month travel ban.³² In December 2017, two members of the Church of Iran, arrested in 2012 during a raid on a prayer meeting, were sentenced to eight years in prison each.³³

In 2017, several other incidents against Christians were reported.³⁴ Four Evangelical Christians, three of them Azerbaijani citizens, were sentenced in May 2017 to 10 years in prison each for house church activities and evangelism. In July 2017, Pentecostal Assyrian Church Pastor Victor Bet Tamraz, together with three other members of his community, received 10 to 15-year sentences.³⁵

Arrests and seizures continued throughout 2018. In January Pastor Tamraz's wife was sentenced to ten years in jail. Shamiram Isavi Khabizeh was charged with "acting against national security and against the regime by organising small groups, attending a seminary abroad and training church leaders and pastors to act as spies". She had been previously detained in June 2017 and was only released after paying the equivalent of US\$30,000 in bail. The couple's son, Ramil was also facing charges. Aziz Majidzadeh, a 54-year-old Iranian Christian convert, was arrested in March 2018 and 20 others were seized at the same time when security forces stormed their workshop near Karaj. Authorities confiscated personal effects, including mobile phones and laptop computers. Majidzadeh's family did not know what had happened to him until he contacted them 45 days later. He said that he was in Evin Prison, Tehran. He had still not been formally charged; questioning by authorities had focused on his Christian faith.³⁶

Minority Sunni Muslims live mostly in underdeveloped areas. They tend to experience discrimination in the workplace and are also politically under-represented. As a result of their religious practices, many Sunni activists report harsh conditions and treatment in prison. About 120 Sunnis are in prison for their beliefs and religious activities. In August 2016, 22 Sunnis, including cleric Shahram Ahmadi, were executed for "enmity against God."³⁷ A false confession was extracted from Ahmadi, who had been arrested in 2009 and charged with unsubstantiated security offences. The charge of "enmity against God" has been used against other Sunnis who were also sentenced to death after unfair trials.³⁸

According to human rights groups, the detention and harassment of Sunnis have intensified following the June 2017 attacks in Tehran by Daesh (ISIS). Furthermore, despite repeated requests for the right to build an official mosque in Tehran, Iranian authorities have refused, forcing Sunnis to pray in smaller prayer halls.³⁹

Eminent Sunni leader Molavi Abdul Hamid and Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei publicly exchanged letters in August and September 2017 concerning anti-Sunni discrimination in employment and mosque construction.⁴⁰ Khamenei wrote that "no kind of discrimination or inequality by the institutions of the Islamic Republic is allowed based on race, ethnicity or religion."⁴¹ This, however, is far from what Sunni communities experience.

Followers of Sufi orders have been targeted for "following a deviant sect"⁴² as their beliefs and practices are considered not to conform with the state's official interpretation of Islam.⁴³ Members of Iran's largest Sufi order, the Nematollahi Gonabadi, have been subjected to widespread harassment. They have been arrested, physically assaulted, and expelled from educational and cultural establishments. They have seen their homes and prayer centres attacked and their leaders have been banned from travelling. Iran's state television regularly portrays them in a negative light.⁴⁴

In November 2016, five Sufis were charged with various offences, including "insulting the sacred" and "insulting senior officials."⁴⁵ In 2017, scores of Sufis were sent to jail, fined and flogged.⁴⁶ In the case of a popular Sufi website, several of its administrators were jailed for "membership in a sect endangering national security."⁴⁷ When in late December 2017 five Gonabadi Sufis visited one of the website's administrators, who was in hospital, they too were arrested.⁴⁸

Over the past few years, Iranian authorities have charged many Shia reformers with "insulting Islam,"⁴⁹ criticising the Islamic Republic, and publishing materials deemed deviant with respect to Islamic norms. A dissident Shia cleric, Ayatollah Mohammad Kazemeini Boroujerdi, spent more than a decade in prison after his arrest in 2006 on unspecified charges and was released in January 2017 for medical reason. During his imprisonment, he was reportedly subjected to torture and denied treatment for the health problems he developed as a result of physical and mental abuse.⁵⁰ Since his release, Ayatollah Boroujerdi has been under virtual house arrest.

Iranian authorities also continue to spread anti-Semitic views and target members of the country's Jewish community for actual or imagined "ties to Israel."⁵¹ Prominent clerics have made anti-Semitic statements in mosques. State-run television programmes have done the same. In May 2016, the Iranian government sponsored a cartoon contest on the Holocaust.⁵² In December 2017, two synagogues in Shiraz were attacked, vandalised and their sacred scriptures desecrated.⁵³ Iranian Jews (15,000-20,000) have to live in a hostile environment in which discrimination and hate speech are commonplace.⁵⁴

Zoroastrians, who number 30,000 to 35,000, have also faced increasing oppression and discrimination in recent years. Most notably, in October 2017 when a Zoroastrian elected to local government was suspended because of his religion based on the views of Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, chairman of the Guardian Council,⁵⁵ who is against non-Muslims holding office in majority-Muslim areas.⁵⁶

The Guardian Council has, in fact, rejected an amendment to the national law on local councils approved by the Iranian parliament in December 2017 that would have allowed

members of recognised religious minorities to hold office. As a consequence, 28 of the 30 candidates from the Yarsani community⁵⁷ who ran in the May 2017 election in the city of Hashtgerd were disqualified.⁵⁸ In May 2017, Yarsani leaders wrote an open letter to President Rouhani asking for a clarification of the constitutional status of their religion. As in previous cases, there was no reply.

Under Iranian law, Iranian women, irrespective of religion or beliefs, risk jail and fines if they do not cover themselves from head to toe in public.⁶⁰ Human rights groups have noted that, at least in Tehran, this rule has not been enforced as forcefully as in the past. In December 2017, Tehran police announced they would stop taking women into custody for violating the regulation. However, offenders would be required to attend state-sponsored Islamic education classes. Outside the capital, the dress code is still enforced.⁶¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

The victory of Hassan Rouhani in the presidential elections of June 2013 slightly improved the state of civil rights. Iran's rank in the World Press Freedom Index indicated improvement between 2013 and 2018 going from 174 to 164 out of 180.⁶² But overall, Rouhani has failed to keep his promise to improve freedom of religion, particularly for religious minorities.

During the period under review, the state of religious freedom continued to deteriorate, especially for Bahais, Christian converts, and Sunni Muslims. Since 2013 the number of members of religious minorities imprisoned has increased. Despite some positive amendments in 2013, the Islamic Penal Code continues to justify serious human rights violations. Given the theocratic character of the state and the links between religion and politics, fundamental improvements cannot be expected as long as the current system is in place.

In June 2018, on the initiative of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Rowan Williams, scores of British and US Church leaders signed a petition condemning the Iranian regime for its human rights abuses and mistreatment of religious minorities. "Today, we announce the initiative by Dr Rowan Williams and supported by more than 50 bishops in the UK along with 78 US church leaders, which highlights the plight of the Iranian people and the religious minorities in Iran, particularly the Christians, calling on the international community to act to defend their rights in the face of government harassment and persecution," said one of the signatories, Rt Rev John Pritchard, former Bishop of Oxford. "In our statement, we call on all countries to take into consideration the deplorable situation of human rights in Iran, particularly the painful situation of religious minorities, in navigating their relations with Iran. We urge them to base any improvement of relations with Iran on a cessation of oppression of minorities and on a halt to executions in Iran," he added.⁶³

In February 2018, UN Secretary-General António Guterres told the United Nations Human Rights Council that: "No improvement was observed concerning the situation of religious and ethnic minorities, who remain subject to restrictions. [I] remain concerned by reports of persistent human rights violations of and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities."⁶⁴

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RELIGION



- Muslims: 98,3%
- Others: 1,7%



AREA	POPULATION
435.052km ²	37.548.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Under Iraq's 2005 constitution,¹ Islam is the official state religion and a "source of legislation". According to article 2.1, nothing can contradict Islam, the principles of democracy or constitutionally recognised rights and freedoms. Under article 2.2, the Islamic identity of most Iraqis and the religious rights of Christians, Yazidis, and Mandeans are equally protected.

Article four states that Iraqis have the right "to educate their children in their mother tongue, such as Turkmen, Syriac, and Armenian shall be guaranteed in government educational institutions in accordance with educational guidelines, or in any other language in private educational institutions."

Racism, terrorism and takfirism (accusing other Muslims of apostasy) are banned, under article seven. The state has a duty under article 10 to maintain and protect "holy shrines and religious sites" as well as "the free practice of rituals in them".

Equality before the law is guaranteed, under article 14, "without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, origin, colour, religion, sect, belief or opinion, or economic or social status." The state is bound by article 37 to protect individuals "from intellectual, political and religious coercion".

The law regulates personal status according to the various "religions, sects, beliefs, and choices", according to article 41. "[F]reedom of thought, conscience, and belief" are guaranteed under article 42.

Iraqis are free, under article 43.1, to practise their religious rites, manage their religious affairs, institutions and endowments (waqf) as "regulated by law". Likewise, the state guarantees and protects places of worship, under article 43.2.

Muslims cannot convert to other religions.² Under article 372 of Iraq's 1969 Penal Code, insulting religious beliefs, practices, symbols or individuals seen as holy, worshipped or revered can be punished with imprisonment (of up to three years) or fines.³

By law nine seats out of 329 in the Council of Representatives (lower house of parliament) are reserved for members of minority groups: Baghdad, Nineveh, Kirkuk, Erbil, and Dohuk each have one reserved seat for a Christian; one for a Yazidi; one for a Sabeen-Mandaean; one for a Shabak; and one seat for a Faili Kurd in Wasit.⁴

Incidents

Central Government

During the period under review, several measures were taken by the central government aimed at advancing the Islamisation of Iraqi society.

On 23rd October 2016, the Shia-based State of Law coalition presented a bill in parliament to ban alcohol, which Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi accepted in December, a step seen as discriminatory by non-Muslim minorities.⁵ Proponents of the law argued that alcohol is banned under Shari'a, and that the government cannot derive nor use any tax revenue from its production, consumption, and sale. Unconvinced, Christian lawmaker Joseph Sylawa said that "the ban on alcohol is part of a war against religious minorities that aims to force them out of the country through exclusion, marginalisation, and harassment policies."⁶

On 28th October 2016, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research issued a decree mandating conservative uniforms for female students on university campuses.⁷ The restrictions include a ban on trousers, short skirts and high heels. Following criticism, the Ministry issued a clarification, saying that "uniform rules should be strictly applied but each university administration can determine the specifications of its uniform."⁸ For the decree's critics, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the uniform requirement comes from conservative parties seeking to impose Islamic values on society.⁹

In November 2017, the Iraqi parliament rejected an amendment to the Personal Status Law introduced by the Fadhila (Islamic Virtue) Party along with other Shia Muslim parties. Known as the "underage marriage law", it would have required Iraqis to be identified by religion, something that would infringe religious freedom. Had it been approved, Shia and Sunni clerics would control marriage-related matters as well as inheritance and divorce, allowing them to marry girls as young as eight.¹⁰ Although the bill was not adopted, several parties have threatened to reintroduce it. If it is, it would alter Iraq's current secular legal system and require courts to apply religious law in family and personal matters.¹¹

Kurdish Autonomous Region

In 2016, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) took steps in support of minorities such as the Minority Rights Law (upholding freedom of religion and outlawing religious discrimination), appointing minority religious representatives, and attempting to incorporate minorities in the Peshmerga.

Shari'a is included in KRG's draft constitution as a source of legislation, but unlike Iraq's federal Constitution, it also allows legislation that contradicts Shari'a and recognises the rights of non-Muslims. Kurdistan's 111-member parliament has also reserved seats for

IRAQ minority communities: five seats for Turkmen; five for Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syriacs; one seat for Armenians, but none for Yazidis or Shabaks.

Despite the seemingly better treatment, religious minorities complain that, although KRG laws are not explicitly discriminatory, they are not enforced and the court system seems to favour ethnic Kurds. Religious minorities are also increasingly concerned about growing extremism in both the Shia and Sunni Arab communities.¹²

After Kurdish forces seized ethnically diverse areas during the fight against Daesh (ISIS),¹³ tensions between the KRG and the Iraqi central government rose. In order to control these areas better, Kurdish authorities and security services are believed to want to “Kurdify” them by destroying non-Kurdish property and preventing non-Kurds from returning to their homes. Some reports suggest that those who do not support Kurdish parties are denied humanitarian or financial aid.¹⁴ Assyrians in more remote areas have complained that Kurds have taken their land, sometimes with Kurdish officials turning a blind eye. Many Yazidis also report discrimination and pressure to identify as Kurds. Conversely, Christians in the capital Erbil and major cities acknowledge the KRG’s support.¹⁵

Aftermath of Daesh (ISIS) seizure of Nineveh Plains

Iraq’s religious minorities¹⁶ have experienced substantial decline since Daesh took over large swathes of Iraq in 2014. Before 2003 Iraqi Christians numbered around 1.4 million, Christian leaders estimate that there are fewer than 250,000 left. The Mandaean community has also seen a drastic fall in numbers. In the mid-1990s there were around 300,000, but current estimates suggest there are only 1-2,000 left. The vast fall in these groups is not just the result of the recent Daesh campaign but also of targeted attacks on these communities by Islamists following the 2003 invasion of Iraq.¹⁷ In 2006 Yazidis were estimated at about 4-500,000, and this may have fallen to around 300,000. However the Pew research Centre has raised questions over the reliability of some of the data about the group’s numbers.¹⁸ Kaka’i (Yarsanis) now number at no more than 300,000, and Baha’is at less than 2,000.¹⁹

In the areas seized by Daesh, following their seizure of Mosul in June 2014, significant numbers of religious minorities were driven out of their towns and villages. Many were displaced to Erbil, northern Iraq’s semi-autonomous Kurdish capital.²⁰ Others went north to Dohuk or sought to leave Iraq altogether. Members of religious minorities were seized and imprisoned by Daesh, Yazidis were often killed or forced into sexual slavery.²¹ Christians were forced to convert, often under threat of violence, and those who refused had their children taken and placed with Islamist families.²² A number of Christians also reported sexual abuse. There is evidence that, in carrying out these crimes, Daesh was trying to systematically eliminate both groups. This has been recognised by a number of bodies as genocide including the European Parliament and the US State Department as Genocide. In September 2017, the UN Security Council finally approved Resolution 2379 authorising a UN team to “collect, preserve, and store evidence of acts that may be war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide”.²³ The resolution, which was four years in the making, created the position of UN Special Adviser to promote accountabi-

lity in relation to Daesh's atrocities and to work with survivors.²⁴ This body replaced the previous informal efforts to prosecute captured Daesh members, through the Nineveh Investigations Unit.²⁵

In February 2017, NGOs uncovered over 50 mass graves in northern Iraq, such as the Khasfa sinkhole with 4,000 bodies, including captured policemen and Yazidi men.²⁶ In December, it was announced that 62 mass graves containing the bodies of Yazidis had been found in Sinjar, in the west of the Nineveh Plains.²⁷ Estimates from local authorities and human rights organisations in Iraq suggest that somewhere between 2-5,500 Yazidis were killed and more than 6,000 kidnapped during Daesh's August 2014 attack on Mount Sinjar alone.²⁸ There were also unconfirmed reports of a mass grave containing 40 Christians located outside Mosul in March 2018.²⁹

Mosul was the first settlement to fall to Daesh, and the impact of the extremists' seizure of the town continued to affect daily life well into 2017.³⁰ Unlike elsewhere on the Nineveh Plains, Christians in Mosul were initially given three options: convert to Islam, submit to dhimma status and pay the jizya (poll tax) payment, or flee.³¹ But this was changed when Christians were subsequently told to convert or "there is nothing for [you] but the sword".³² Local Christians, who numbered around 120,000, fled to Iraqi Kurdistan often with nothing but the clothes they were wearing.³³ In Mosul and the surrounding area alone, at least 33 churches were burnt and/or suffered significant damage. Daesh used many of them as military bases or administrative buildings. Several reports indicate that Daesh also destroyed and stole artefacts from major heritage sites including churches and sold them on the black market. Villages around Mosul also had crucial infrastructure destroyed, in part due to shelling and airstrikes by liberation forces.³⁴

With the rise of Daesh, the Christian communities experienced an "overall loss of hope for a safe and secure future" leading to significant numbers fleeing in the aftermath of the Nineveh Plains seizure.³⁵ However, an early 2017 survey found that given the right conditions 87 percent of displaced Christians in Erbil, where the majority fled, indicated that they would be willing to return, with 41 percent saying that they definitely wanted to go back.³⁶ In June 2017, the head of Aid to the Church in Need's Middle East projects, Father Andrzej Halemba, noted that the number of Christians wanting to return to their villages "keeps increasing".³⁷ Christians have been encouraged to return to their villages by the Churches despite tensions between the central government in Baghdad and the Kurdish Regional Government over the future of the region. A de facto border maintained by armed units belonging to the two administrations continues to divide the Nineveh Plains.

In August 2017, on the third anniversary of the fall of the Nineveh Plain to Daesh, Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako urged displaced Christians to "return quickly to reclaim their lands before others seize them" and to avoid internal disputes. "We are the indigenous people of this country and its ancient civilisations. Our history is traced back to the oldest Christian Church in the world."³⁸ In September 2017, a ceremony took place in Qaraqosh, the largest of Nineveh's Christian towns, to celebrate the long-awaited homecoming of some 500 Christian families.³⁹ Helping to coordinate the ceremony was a priest from Qaraqosh called Father George Jahola, from the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee (NRC),

which was established by Aid to the Church in Need in March 2017 to rebuild destroyed Christian settlements. The committee was formed to include representatives of the Syriac Catholic, Syriac Orthodox and Chaldean Catholic Churches. According to NRC figures, as of June 2018, 25,650 Christians had returned to Qaraqosh,⁴⁰ which had been Iraq's last Christian majority town before it fell to Daesh. Nearby Yazidi and Christian towns and villages including Bartela, Karamles and Teleskof have all seen considerable numbers of displaced people return.⁴¹

However, with the exception of aid from the Hungarian government, most of the funds for rebuilding homes have come from private donations. While the UN has overseen the refurbishment of schools, there have been problems with the work that they have done for religious minority groups. Stephen Rasche, from the Chaldean Catholic Archdiocese of Erbil, told a hearing at the US House of Representatives that so-called "completed" schools in the Christian-majority Teleskov and Batnaya were unusable. They only received "one thin coat of paint on the exterior surface walls, with freshly stencilled UNICEF logos every 30 feet". No work had been done inside the buildings. In October 2017, four members of the US Congress, in a letter to Mark Green, administrator of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in Washington, DC, called on the latter to bypass the United Nations and channel funds intended to help Christians and Yazidis in Iraq directly to charities operating on the ground.⁴²

Other incidents

In November 2016 four gunmen opened fire on two two Mandaean men as they were driving to work in Kirkuk. Sami Kafif Z. Al-Zuhairy was killed. As the attackers left they described their victims as "Kuffar" – non-Muslims.⁴³

In May 2017, during Ramadan, Daesh targeted an ice-cream shop in a Baghdad Shia neighbourhood killing at least 17 people and injuring another 32.⁴⁴ In September, scores of people were killed and wounded in a double attack by Daesh against two restaurants.⁴⁵

In June 2017, a video was released showing Sheikh Alaa Al-Mousawi, head of the Shia Endowment,⁴⁶ described Christians as "infidels" who "should convert to Islam," be killed or pay the jizya. By way of explanation, Al-Mousawi said the video dates back to 2014. Others insist it was more recent.⁴⁷

In March 2018 a Christian doctor and his family were stabbed to death in Baghdad.⁴⁸ Later the same week, a member of the Mandaean community was kidnapped and later found dead.⁴⁹ That same month, in the south town Nassiriyah, a Mandaean was stabbed while working in his shop. He survived after Muslim neighbours came to his assistance.⁵⁰

Prospects for freedom of religion

Daesh's seizure of the Nineveh Plains saw grave atrocities against Yazidis, Christians, Shabak and other groups, especially Shias, which the United States and other countries have described as genocide. Sunnis who did not agree with the group's extremist ideology were also targeted. There were reports about mass killings, systematic rape, kidnapping,

enslavement, especially of women, stealing, and the destruction of religious sites like churches and mosques.

However, with the defeat of Daesh things have started to improve. Christians and a few other religious minority groups have started to return to their homes, but their overall numbers in Iraq have declined. During Daesh occupation, many fled the country – some went to elsewhere in the Middle East but many to the West, and it looks highly unlikely that most of these will return.

While the Iraqi government, in general, respects freedom of worship for Christians, Yazidis and others, the minorities are not particularly well protected. Intimidation and attacks continue and often go unpunished. Proposed legislation on alcohol, female university students' dress code, and underage marriage, which would move the country in a more Islamist direction, would impact religious minorities.

The results of the May 2018 general elections, the first since the Iraqi government announced the defeat of Daesh, brought further instability to the country. Because of serious allegations of fraud and irregularities, ballots are still being recounted in many provinces at the time of writing this report.⁵¹ Sunni-Shia tensions in the country continue to add to the instability.

In general, despite signs of improvement, religious freedom in Iraq suffers from deep sectarian cleavages that are not likely to go away any time soon.

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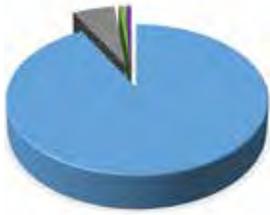
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IRELAND

RELIGION



- Christians: 92,1%
- Agnostics: 6,2%
- Muslims: 1%
- Others: 0,7%



AREA

69,797km²

POPULATION

4.714.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The protection of religious freedom in the Republic of Ireland is legally guaranteed at both a national level, under the Constitution of Ireland,¹ and a supranational level, under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.² Article 44.2 of the Irish constitution protects freedom of conscience, profession and practice of religion.

The state also makes guarantees not to endow any religion nor make adherence to any religion grounds for discrimination. There is an important guarantee that all religions have the right to buy and maintain educational and charitable institutes and to manage their own business and property without state interference. The freedom for people to convert, proselytise and educate others (including their children) in any religion is legally upheld in Ireland.³ Broadly speaking, state protection of religious worship and expression remains comparatively advanced by international standards.

The country will be holding a referendum on the repeal of article 40.6.1 of the Irish constitution which governs Irish legislation for blasphemy, defining it as a "matter that is grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion, thereby causing outrage among a substantial number of the adherents of that religion."⁴

It is difficult to gauge reliable figures of religious discrimination in Ireland as there is evidence that Garda statistics are unreliable, untrustworthy⁵ and, in some cases, scandalous.⁶ However, there is compelling evidence of pervasive and deepening anti-Catholic bias in Ireland's mainstream media and political establishment.⁷ This has been particularly evident in the treatment and demands made of both the boards and patrons of Catholic hospitals – in the wake of the Irish public's repeal of the 8th Amendment⁸ (which gave constitutional and legal protection to the unborn child). Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar has stated that in regards to respecting Catholic beliefs and teaching in Catholic institutions that receive state funding:

it will not, however, be possible for publicly funded hospitals, no matter who their patron or owner is, to opt out of providing these necessary services (abortion for any reason up to 12 week gestation) which will be legal in this state once this legislation is passed by the Dail and Seanad...I'm happy to give you (the Oireachtas or Parliament of Ireland) that

assurance... That legislation will allow individuals to opt out based on their consciences or their religious convictions but will not allow institutions to do so.⁹

While the state provides universally free primary education, the majority control of Ireland's primary schools is with Christian religious denominations (96 percent) – with the Catholic Church owning or patronising some 90 percent.¹⁰ This has been a source of increasingly antagonistic political opposition and social protest.¹¹ Denominational schools are permitted to fulfil their purpose (educating the children of their own faith community) by admitting children of their own faith ahead of other children in the event of over-enrolment but this right is coming under heavy pressure, including from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's (UNCRC).¹² Additionally, the right of religious organisations, including faith schools, to employ staff who will respect and uphold the ethos of their employer has been curtailed via an amendment to section 37 of the Employment Equality Act.¹³

In May 2018,¹⁴ an Education Bill was introduced in the Irish Parliament which rescinded the so-called 'baptism-barrier' that was initially set up to ensure that only those people who professed the religious ethos of the school could attend (it was passed just outside of the time scale covered by this report in July 2018). From September 2019, most primary schools will not be able to give priority access to children on the basis of their religion. The majority of primary schools in the state – just over 90 per cent – are of a Catholic ethos. The School Admissions Bill prohibits these schools from giving enrolment priority to baptised children in cases where they are over-subscribed. However, minority faiths will still be allowed to prioritise members of their religion to protect their ethos in cases where they are over-subscribed. This exclusion, according to the Minister for Education Richard Bruton, has been introduced to help ensure children of minority faiths access a school of their own religion, but this provision will be reviewed after three years.

Incidents

Related to Christianity

In October 2017¹⁵, the Holy Trinity Church, a Church of Ireland church, in Connemara was extensively damaged by vandals with its interiors ruined, windows smashed, electrics ripped out of the walls, and the pulpit, pews and organ all destroyed.

The Catholic Archbishop of Tuam Michael Neary described the destruction as "an act of persecution against all Christians" further observing that:

"the Holy Bible [was] thrown out the window; the Cross [was] being used as a weapon to smash items; overturned and broken pews; damage to the altar; the pulpit; the organ; and the lights ripped out. This damage is not just a criminal act: rather it is an act motivated by anti-Christian sentiment and is a challenge to freedom of religious expression in Ireland today. Religious freedom is at the heart of human rights and not without cost. In too many countries, places of worship are being destroyed and people are being killed and persecuted for their religious beliefs."

In April 2018,¹⁶ 37-year old Jamie O'Connor told parish priest Father Tom Hogan that he would cut his throat in the Church grounds of St Peter and Paul Cathedral in Ennis, County Clare. In his statement to Gardai on the assault, Father Hogan noted that "I was fearful for my own safety in a way that I have never been before during my 20 years in Ennis." This incident, as with those noted in ACN's Religious Freedom in the World report 2014 – 2016, is representative of an increasing amount of anti-social incidents taking place within Churches against worshippers¹⁷ or indeed sacrilegious acts in Christian places of worship.¹⁸

Related to Islam

Overall, the total recorded number of anti-Islamic incidents in Ireland remain rare, which is noteworthy considering that officially Islam has been Ireland's third largest religion since 2016.¹⁹ However, there are still isolated incidents that represent a wider struggle for integration between Irish communities and Muslim immigrants across the island of Ireland. For example, in August of 2017, a pig's head was dumped outside of a mosque in Newtownards, County Down²⁰ and in October 2017 in Dublin, a Muslim schoolgirl's veil was torn from her face and she was subject to serious verbal abuse.²¹

Related to Judaism

The Jewish population of Ireland, though numbering only 1,600,²² are successful and historically well-integrated and respected in Irish society. There has however been a growing and persistent left-wing association with Islamist, anti-Semitic movements in Ireland and abroad.²³ Concerns were expressed after a bill was considered by Ireland's Senate that would criminalise trade with east Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the West Bank in January 2018. The bill orders that any Irish citizen found guilty of engaging in trade with areas of Israel beyond the pre-1967 lines could be jailed for up to five years and fined up to €250,000.²⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

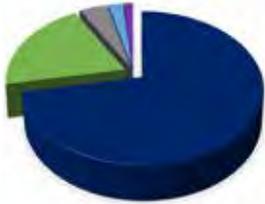
From June 2016 to June 2018 evidence suggests that religious freedom in Ireland decreased slightly, partly given the rapid cultural and moral upheaval evidenced through constitutional and legislative changes made with regards abortion and homosexual marriage alongside an increasingly bold social, political and media antipathy towards Catholicism. However, Ireland's religious freedom remains comparatively good by international standards. This report also notes that there is an increase in the targeting of religious and worshippers in their places of worship by criminals and criminal gangs. Overall, with respect to how the state respects the freedom of conscience of Catholic patronised schools and hospitals indicate into the future, it is likely that the religious freedom of Christians will be constantly checked and challenged in the coming two years.

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RELIGION



● Jews: 71,9%
● Muslims: 20%
● Agnostics: 4,3%
● Christians: 2,3%
● Others: 1,5%



AREA	POPULATION
22.072km ²	8.192.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Since its inception in 1948, Israel defines itself as a Jewish and democratic state.¹ Jews around the world who meet certain criteria are entitled to become citizens of the state. In 1967, Israel conquered East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights. To the present day these territories are disputed and the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council and the International Court of Justice consider them to be under occupation, and parts thereof settled illegally.²

The biggest non-Jewish group in the country is Sunni Arab Palestinians. The majority of Israeli Christians are also Palestinian Arabs. Both hold Israeli citizenship. Most Christians belong to the Melkite Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic Churches followed by the Greek Orthodox Church. Other minorities include the 102,000-strong Druze community. In 1957, the Druze were designated as a distinct ethnic community by the government at the request of their religious leaders.³

Different political incidents, which also have a religious connotation, provoked an upsurge of violence. In July 2017, three men opened fire on two Israeli Druze policemen at the Lions' Gate in Jerusalem.⁴ The site was shut down and reopened a couple of days later after checkpoints with metal detectors were set up. These security measures led to important protests by Muslim leaders. The metal detectors were removed.⁵

The decision by the President of the United States, Donald Trump, to move the American Embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem, and therefore to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, prompted demonstrations and a series of official declarations condemning it.

Israel has no formal constitution, so it is necessary to refer to the 1948 declaration of independence for the provisions relating to religious freedom. According to the declaration, "The State of Israel will [...] ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations."⁶ The Israeli Supreme Court has ruled that the Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty is the basis of fundamental freedoms such as religion.⁷

Judaism is not the official state religion in Israel. State institutions are secular and function according to the model of western democracies. Nonetheless, provisions specific to Judaism predominate in social practices, such as the observance of the Sabbath, kosher food, etc. These can create tensions between observant Jews and non-religious Jews. Non-Jewish citizens have in theory the same civil rights and obligations as Jewish citizens; in practice they may take part in elections, join political parties and be elected to the Knesset (parliament). Nonetheless, their role is insignificant in political life and, with certain exceptions – notably the Druze – they are not drafted for military service. However, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu favours the admission of Arab Christians into the Israeli army.⁸

Conversions from one religion to another are legal but face considerable social pressure.

Proselytising is legal for all religious groups. The law prohibits offering a material benefit as an inducement to conversion. It is also illegal to convert a person under 18 unless one parent is an adherent of the religious group seeking to convert the minor.⁹

Matters relating to personal status are governed by the recognised religious communities to which a citizen belongs. There is no civil marriage, though such marriages performed abroad are recognised. Under Jewish religious law, inter-religious marriages, for example between Jews and non-Jews, are not possible. While Muslim men can marry non-Muslims, Muslim women cannot marry non-Muslim men.

Incidents

On 18th January 2017 the Bilateral Permanent Working Commission between the Holy See and the State of Israel met in Jerusalem to continue negotiations in accordance with the 1993 Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel¹⁰ (article 10 paragraph two).¹¹

On 20th September 2017 the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land issued a statement condemning the desecration and vandalism of St Stephen's Church inside Beit Jamal Salesian Monastery, west of Jerusalem, the previous day.¹² A statue of Mary was shattered, faces of figures on the stained-glass windows were broken, and a cross destroyed. Father Scudu, caretaker of the church, said that it felt as though the damage was motivated by hate. "They smashed everything," he noted. This was the third time in the past five years that the Beit Jamal Monastery had been vandalised.¹³

Following the attack, Israel Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld denied allegations of police inefficiency in vandalism investigations, noting that "There have been arrests in previous cases. [...] People can say what they want. This kind of case is top priority."¹⁴ He added that most of the cases are unrelated and that there is not a "vandalism cell" which targets Christian and Muslim places or worship. The bishops issued a statement demanding the state punish the attackers "and educate the people not to make similar offenses. [...] We hope] that all peoples, especially [in] our Holy Land, learn to coexist with each other in love and mutual respect, regardless to the diversities among them."¹⁵

Wadie Abunassar, adviser to the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, said that, despite some 80 incidents of vandalism against churches and Christians sites over the last decade, there were very few arrests or indictments. “We get sympathy and nice words from everybody, but we are sick of that. We want convictions, not only indictments,”¹⁶ Abunassar said. In September 2017, he noted that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had yet to respond to several requests from the bishops to meet with him concerning the continuing vandalism.¹⁷ “We must organise a protest movement and meet with Israeli politicians to make it clear that such acts are not acceptable in Israel.”¹⁸

Since 2009, at least 53 churches and mosques have been vandalised in Israel and the occupied West Bank. Out of the 53 cases, only eight were still under investigation as of July 2017.¹⁹ Concerning the high number of unsolved crimes, Gadi Gvanyahu, chairman of Tag Meir, a coalition of moderate religious organisations,²⁰ told Haaretz that it is a question of police priorities. “Without a doubt, they aren’t looking hard enough.”²¹ He added that despite security camera footage that included images of the suspected vandals’ cars, some crimes remain unsolved.

According to Gvanyahu, after the Church of the Loaves and Fishes attack in June 2015, “someone – apparently the prime minister – decided they had to find them. So they found them.”²² At Tag Meir’s request, a parliamentary question concerning this matter was filed by a Member of Knesset (MK), Itzik Shmuli (Zionist Union). Shmuli said that when “about 85 percent of the cases in such serious crimes are closed with nothing,” this should “sound an alarm about the order of priorities.”²³ In a letter to Shmuli, Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan said that the investigations had concluded that “[these attacks] were perpetrated from various motives, ranging from negligence through mental illness and, in extreme cases, incidents of arson that appear deliberate.”²⁴ But as Shmuli argued, this seems to contradict the fact that most of the cases were closed on the grounds of “perpetrator unknown”. Furthermore, Gvanyahu said that these official declarations fail to take into account that most of the attacks were accompanied by hateful graffiti. For Gvanyahu, Erdan’s letter was “disconnected from reality.”²⁵ After a peak in 2013, three attacks were recorded in 2016 and four in the first half of 2017.²⁶

In response to US President Donald Trump’s decision to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, thus recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the Mayor of Nazareth Ali Salam said he would cancel Christmas festivities in order to protest against this decision. “Our identity and faith cannot be bargained. [President Trump’s] decision has taken away the joy of the holiday and we will cancel the festivities this year.”²⁷ He later backtracked and declared: “[I] invite all the residents of the State of Israel — Jews, Muslims and Christians — to come to the city of Nazareth and take part in the Christmas celebrations.” Mayor Salam added: “Nazareth is the city of peace and brotherhood between religions and nations, and there is nothing like the spirit of the holiday and the shared experience to prove it.”²⁸

At the beginning of February 2018, Jerusalem Municipality announced that 887 properties belonging to various Churches and UN institutions in the city owed municipal tax – despite being previously exempt from such charges.²⁹ The Holy Sepulchre, revered as

the site of Jesus's crucifixion and burial, was closed in protest.³⁰ But, following an official statement in which the Jerusalem Municipality announced the suspension of "the (tax) collection actions it has taken in recent weeks,"³¹ the Church was reopened.³² According to the Prime Minister's Office, the government decided that, in order to try to find a solution, an Israeli commission led by a cabinet minister would negotiate plans to tax Church-owned commercial properties in Jerusalem with representatives of the Churches. The commission, which is chaired by Tzachi Hanegbi, Israeli Minister for Regional Cooperation,³³ was also tasked with looking into the issue of ecclesiastical properties rented for long periods via the Jewish National Fund, where contracts had been signed between the Church and the state.³⁴

Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat declared that the Churches owed the city more than US\$180 million in property tax from their commercial holdings. Church leaders said Church-owned businesses, such as hotels and office spaces in Jerusalem, had always enjoyed a tax exemption. A statement from the Prime Minister's Office said that debate on legislation that would give Israel the possibility of expropriating land Churches recently sold to private real estate firms would be suspended.³⁵ Being major landowners in Jerusalem, Churches said that such a law would make it more difficult to sell Church-owned land. These sales help to cover the operating costs of their religious institutions.³⁶ Jordan, as the Custodian of the Holy Places in Jerusalem, is closely monitoring "this serious issue" and defended the position of Jerusalem Churches.³⁷

On 15th February 2018 the Foreign Minister of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), met with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State, and then with Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States. He stressed that the Holy See felt that it was important to lead a conference on Jerusalem at which the leaders and representatives of all the Churches and communities of the baptised would reiterate the importance to Christians of the city where Christ died on the cross and rose.³⁸

On 25th March 2018 during the traditional Palm Sunday procession in Jerusalem, Israeli soldiers attacked Palestinian Christians and forbade them from carrying the Palestinian flag.³⁹ Because of security considerations, Israel said that it would only let Christians aged 55 and above come to Jerusalem to celebrate Easter. Israel denied entry to the city to Christians from Gaza, who are mostly Greek Orthodox and number about a thousand.⁴⁰

On 1st June 2018 Father Fadi Shalufa, administrator of the Chapel of the Milk Grotto in Bethlehem, was attacked.⁴¹ Father Shalufa, a Franciscan priest, had allowed a group of pilgrims who were being harassed by two young men to enter the church and closed the gate to prevent access. Unable to enter the church, the two aggressors started shouting and one of them tried to hit Father Shalufa with a blunt object, but he was not injured. Wadi Abunassar, spokesman for the Assembly of the Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, thanked the PNA for acting quickly to apprehend the two attackers.⁴²

Prospects for religious freedom

In Israel, political and religious matters are very much inter-related. Christians are caught between Orthodox Jews and Islamic extremists. Regional tensions and the ongoing Syrian civil war do not help the quest for a peaceful solution.

In May 2016, Latin Patriarch Fouad Twal said that Israel, “although it proclaims itself a secular and democratic State, is really behaving more and more like a denominational Jewish military regime”.⁴³ This, he added, “is the first time that a Christian minority lives in a Jewish state with all the consequences associated with being a minority; and it is the first case in history where a Jewish majority has a state. But this majority continues to behave, and especially to defend itself, as if it were actually a minority, with the temptation of living as a theocratic state inspired by the Bible, and not as a secular state.”⁴⁴ In Israel, religion and nationalism are often linked, causing problems for religious minorities including Muslims and Christians. Infringements on the latter’s religious rights are often more motivated by political factors than by specifically religious ones. But there is a tendency among groups on the extreme fringes of the Israeli right to attack non-Jews and their institutions solely on religious grounds.

Endnotes

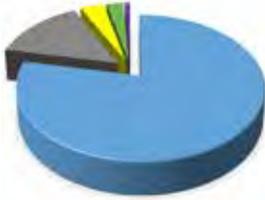
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ITALY

RELIGION



● Christians: 78,3%
● Agnostics: 14,5%
● Atheists: 3,7%
● Muslims: 2,7%
● Others: 0,8%



AREA	POPULATION
302.073km ²	59.801.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Italian legislation on religious freedom guarantees freedom of religion or belief and recognises it as a fundamental right. Article 3 of the constitution expresses the principle of non-discrimination on religious grounds, stating that “all citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions.”¹ Article 19 guarantees the individual’s right to profess “their religious belief in any form, individually or with others, and to promote them [sic] and celebrate rites in public or in private, provided they are not offensive to public morality”. Article 8 of the constitution guarantees that “all religious denominations are equally free before the law”.

Italy has no state religion, but Catholicism is the religion of most Italian citizens. Article 7 of the constitution asserts that the Italian state and the Catholic Church are independent and sovereign, and the 1929 Lateran Pacts, amended in 1984, govern their relations. The Government allows the Catholic Church to select teachers to provide religious education in state schools.

Relations between the state and denominations other than Catholicism are regulated by law, based on accords with the respective religious organisations. Before applying to enter into such an accord, the non-Catholic organisation needs to be recognised as having legal personality by the Interior Ministry, in accordance with Law No. 1159/29. The request is then submitted to the Office of the Prime Minister. An accord grants ministers of religion automatic rights of access to state hospitals, prisons, and military barracks; it allows for the civil registration of religious marriages; it facilitates special religious practices regarding funerals; it also exempts students from school attendance on religious holidays. Any religious group without an accord may request these benefits from the Ministry of Interior on a case-by-case basis. An accord also allows a religious group to receive funds collected by the state through the so-called ‘Eight per thousand’, a compulsory deduction (0.8 percent) from taxpayers annual income tax.

Twelve non-Catholic denominations have an accord with the Italian state and an agreement with the Jehovah’s Witnesses has been being negotiated since 1997.

There is no agreement with the Islamic community, despite the fact that it represents the largest non-Christian group in Italy and that 32.6 percent of the immigrant population are Muslims.² The lack of an agreement results from the lack of a recognised, official Islamic leadership to negotiate agreements with the government. Nonetheless, the Italian Ministry of Home Affairs tried to deal with Islam-related issues by creating a Council for Italian Islam in 2005, and elaborating both the 'Charter of Values of Citizenship and Integration,' in 2007, and the 'Declaration of Intent for a Federation of Italian Islam,' in 2008.

In 2016, the 'Council for relationship with Italian Islam' was established under the Ministry of Home Affairs to raise awareness about Islam and deepen dialogue with the Islamic community. Following this, on 1st February 2017, the 'National Pact for an Italian Islam' was signed by the Ministry of Home Affairs and representatives of Italy's main Muslim associations. In the agreed document, among other things, all parties undertake to: "encourage the development and growth of dialogue", "ensure that the places of worship maintain decent standards in compliance with the existing legislation," and "guarantee that Friday sermons are delivered or translated into Italian."³

During the reporting period, the 'Observatory on Religious Minorities in the World and on the Respect for Religious Freedom' was also established under the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of International Cooperation.⁴ The activity of the observatory is part of Italian foreign policy in favour of the protection and promotion of freedom of religion.

Incidents

Catholics have expressed disquiet about anti-ecclesiastical feeling and the promotion of anti-Christian values. Catholics are often criticised when they publicly express their opinions on issues of social and ethical concern such as abortion, gay marriage, and euthanasia.

On 14th December 2017 a bill passed into law governing 'living wills'. The legislation allows severely ill people to refuse treatment that would prolong their lives. Many voices within the Church criticised the bill. Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin stated: "One of the deficiencies of this law is that it does not provide for conscientious objection by doctors, health workers and the Catholic institutions."⁵ In response, Health Minister Beatrice Lorenzin said she would guarantee that Catholic doctors might be able to conscientiously object but, at the time of writing, nothing has been done in this regard.

On 5th April 2018, the municipality of Rome ordered the removal of a large anti-abortion poster featuring an 11-week-old foetus in the womb. The poster had been produced by the pro-life association Pro Vita, and had caused many protests from pro-abortion activists, including politicians.⁶

A few months earlier, the municipality of Rome also removed a poster which portrayed Jesus Christ as a pedophile and the Virgin Mary as pregnant due to surrogacy.⁷

On 10th March 2018, in the town of Sant'Angelo Lodigiano, a statue of the Virgin Mary was found decapitated.⁸ In Castelnuovo Don Bosco, the urn containing St John Bosco's brain was stolen from the Salesian Basilica on the night of 2nd June 2017. The culprit

was later arrested.⁹ In March 2018, a statue of the Virgin Mary was stolen from the Park of Martyrs in Rome.¹⁰

The Muslim community complained that there was societal discrimination against Muslims, particularly against Muslim women wearing hijabs.¹¹ Nadia Bouzekri, the president of the Young Muslims in Italy association, said that she was insulted by an airport employee because she refused to remove her hijab in front of other people.¹²

A Pew Research Center survey ranked Italy second out of 10 European countries for bias against Muslims, and asserted that 69 percent of people have a negative view of Muslim worshippers.¹³ A report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) also observed persistent anti-Islamic prejudices within the Italian society.¹⁴

It is difficult to assess whether the bias is religiously motivated or related to a widespread anti-immigrant feeling, as migrants are perceived as mostly Islamic. Muslim people are also identified with Islamic terrorists and are seen as potentially dangerous. This was also noticed by the Italian Chamber of Deputies' Jo Cox Committee on hate, intolerance, xenophobia and racism.¹⁵ The committee's final report confirmed high levels of prejudice and misinformation in Italy, with widespread forms of religious intolerance and discrimination. According to the report, 40 percent of Italian people believe that non-Christian migrants represent a threat to Italian society, while 26.9 percent are against allowing the construction of buildings for non-Christian religions and 41.1 percent oppose the construction of mosques.¹⁶

A phenomenon Italy will certainly have to deal with in the near future is the risk of radicalisation of Muslim inmates detained in Italian prisons. In its XIV Report on detention conditions in Italy, the Antigone Association for inmates' rights noted that the number of inmates at risk of radicalisation increased by 72 percent in 2017.¹⁷

In June 2016 the Jewish Italian community hailed as a success the approval of law n. 115 which makes denial of the Shoah a crime. According to the Observatory on Anti-Semitism, there were about 215 anti-Semitic episodes in Italy in the last two years. Most of these were online anti-Semitic attacks, including the Facebook post of a northern Italian mayor, who insulted Jewish people on International Holocaust Remembrance Day,¹⁸ and the anti-Semitic posts of a Five Star Movement party senator.¹⁹

On October 2017, Lazio soccer team's fans posted stickers of Anne Frank on the jersey of rivals Roma, alongside slogans such as "Roma fans are Jews".²⁰ Several cases of vandalism were also reported, such as the destruction of the Holocaust memorial plaque in Arezzo in January 2018²¹ and the theft of two 'Stolpersteins'²² in Collegno²³ and Venice.²⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

Immigration and EU law forces the Italian government to deal with the growth of non-Christian religious communities and above all Islam which, according to a Pew Research Center study, will consistently grow, reaching 8.3 percent of the population in 2050.²⁵ In this regard, the signature of the 'National treaty for an Italian Islam' is a positive step, which

makes it clear that the government is in the process of creating the necessary structures to promote and protect the right to freedom of religion.

The risk of inmates' radicalisation is a delicate matter to be addressed, along with anti-Semitic attitudes and the right of Catholics to assert their own opinions in the public sphere.

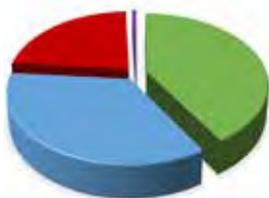
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IVORY COAST

RELIGION



● Muslims: 41,4%
● Christians: 35%
● Ethnoreligionists: 23%
● Others: 0,6%



AREA	POPULATION
322.463 km ²	23.254.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Republic of Ivory Coast is home to around 70 different ethnic groups.¹ Religious affiliation is divided between traditional African religions, which still have many followers, and Islam and Christianity.² Islam shapes the lives of a large part of the population in and from the north of the country, as well as immigrants from neighbouring countries. The umbrella organisation of Ivorian Muslims is the Conseil National Islamique de Côte d'Ivoire. The majority of Christians live in the south. Abidjan, Bouaké, Gagnoa and Korhogo are the seats of the Catholic archdioceses.³

The country has faced huge power struggles in its recent past. A civil war raged from 2002 to 2007, when it was identified as the region's economically strongest and most populous country. The conflict flared up again following presidential elections in 2010. There were violent clashes between supporters of the official election winner Alassane Ouattara, a Muslim, and the followers of his opponent and predecessor, Laurent Gbagbo, a Christian. More than 3,000 people died, and hundreds of thousands were displaced.⁴ It would be simplistic, however, to consider this conflict as "Muslims v. Christians" as politics played an important part. The conflict's consequences – forced displacement and violence – were still felt during the reporting period.⁵

In spite of the country's ethnic and religious diversity, Christians and Muslims in Ivory Coast have traditionally lived side by side in peace. Consequently, violence is more likely to be seen as a symptom of abject poverty and a lack of opportunities.⁶

According to its constitution, Ivory Coast is a secular state based on the French model.⁷ This remained unchanged during the reporting period. The new Ivorian constitution that went into effect 8th November 2016⁸ also includes a pledge to observe the principles of a secular and democratic state (Article 49). Freedom of religion is among the civil liberties guaranteed under Article 4.⁹

Traditionally, the country's many religious communities coexist amicably. For a country with many ethnic groups and religious communities, this is a basic requirement for peace. During the reporting period, the Ivorian government continued to subsidise pilgrimages to Mecca and, for Christians, to France and Israel.¹⁰

Incidents

Manifest lack of stability in Ivory Coast is displayed by unresolved political conflict, deep social tensions, violent crime in greater Abidjan in particular, and ethnic violence in rural areas that occasionally results in bloodshed (including 33 deaths in March 2016 in Bouna, near the border with Burkina Faso).¹¹ Ivory Coast became a target of international jihadism in March 2016 when an attack in Grand Bassam near Abidjan left 22 dead. It was one of the bloodiest jihadist attacks in West Africa. Al-Qaeda au Maghreb Islamique,¹² a terrorist organisation active in the region, claimed responsibility.

The United Nations, officially present in the country until June 2017, alongside French forces with the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, described the country's situation as "fragile".¹³

There were protests by soldiers, gendarmes, policemen and customs officials in various parts of the country during the reporting period, causing fear in the civilian population.¹⁴ Demonstrations such as these are on the rise in many parts of the country because former guerrilla fighters were allowed to join the army. The protests also affected the local Catholic University, Université Catholique d'Afrique de l'Ouest, whose Abidjan campus was attacked on 16th January 2017 by armed men who threatened students and instructors.¹⁵

In a joint message issued on 24th January 2017, the Catholic bishops of the Ivory Coast called for national reconciliation, the release of detainees arrested during the crisis from 2002 to 2011, the redistribution of wealth and greater social justice.¹⁶

In addition, the Ivory Coast faces further challenges. In recent decades, for instance, numerous people have immigrated from neighbouring countries, and many of them today lead lives as stateless persons. The number of economic migrants and refugees fleeing civil wars is estimated at around four million – 20 percent of the total population. Often, these people are Muslims from neighbouring countries to the north.

Prospects for freedom of religion

In the wake of civil war, the country's Catholic bishops are strongly committed to reconciliation, justice and peace.¹⁷ Despite the recent and largely positive trend towards more democracy and economic development, it is not certain that Ivory Coast will regain the stability it once enjoyed, essential for inter-faith coexistence. A great deal depends on progress concerning security and the economy and tackling the threat of jihadism.

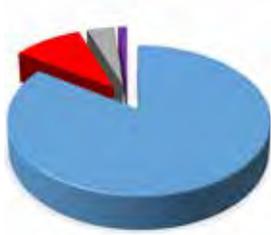
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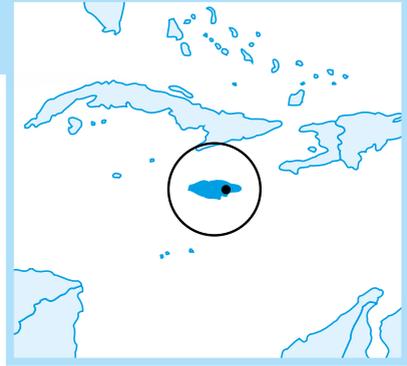
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JAMAICA

RELIGION



- Christians: 84,5%
- Spiritists: 10,1%
- Agnostics: 4,1%
- Others: 1,3%



AREA

10.990km²

POPULATION

2.803.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution (Article 13)¹ establishes that the state has an obligation to promote universal respect and observance of human rights and personal freedoms, to which everyone is entitled by virtue of their inherent dignity as persons.

Article 13 of the constitution also recognises freedom of thought, conscience, belief and observance of political doctrines, the right of association and equality before the law as well as the right not to be discriminated against because of religion.

In Article 17, the constitution enshrines the right to religious freedom, which includes the right to change one's religion and to manifest one's belief, alone or with others, in public or in private, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

This article of the constitution declares that a religious organisation cannot be altered without the consent of the governing authority of that organisation.

Article 17 also states that every religious organisation has the right to provide religious instruction to its members, irrespective of whether it receives public funds or not.

The article also indicates that, except with their own consent (or that of their parents or guardian in case of minors), no person attending a place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or attend a ceremony other than their own.

According to article 14 of the constitution, any person detained has the right to communicate with and be visited by a religious counsellor.

Various authorities must take an oath of allegiance before taking office. The oath includes the final phrase "So help me God".

Incidents

In September 2017, the Church of SS Peter and Paul in Kingston suffered an arson attack. Within the space of a year, the church was attacked again.²

In September 2017, a police officer attached to the Mandeville Police Station, Manchester, claimed that he was the victim of discrimination after reports emerged that his service pistol was taken from him for reading the Qur'an. He was apparently put forward for a psychiatric evaluation to determine whether he had been radicalised.³

Prospects for freedom of religion

In the period from June 2016 to March 2018, there were reports of acts of vandalism against places of worship, as well as expressions of police intolerance or discrimination against an officer for reading the Qur'an. There was another incident in which someone opened fire against people attending a funeral but it was unclear if the motive of the attack was religious. As there were no reported episodes of intolerance in 2014-16, it would appear that the period under review saw a decline in religious freedom, but there is no reason to believe a negative trend has been established.

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JAPAN

RELIGION



- Buddhists: 55,8%
- New Religionists: 26,4%
- Agnostics: 10,2%
- Atheists: 2,8%
- Christians: 2,1%
- Others: 2,7%



AREA	POPULATION
378.000km ²	126.324.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Japan is a democratic constitutional monarchy. Religion is freely practised in a country where Shinto is widely practised (despite the small percentage of people identifying as Shintoists).¹ The government protects the individual's right to practise their religious faith while remaining strictly neutral in the matter. Respect for freedom of religion is based on the existing constitution and laws.

The Constitution of Japan – promulgated on 3rd November 1946 and implemented on 3rd May 1947 – upholds the principles and rules of law relating to religious freedom, including the separation of religion from the state.

Article 20 states: "Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organisation shall receive any privileges from the state, nor exercise any political authority. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite or practice. The state and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity."

Article 89 stated: "No public money or other property shall be expended or appropriated for the use, benefit or maintenance of any religious institution or association, or for any charitable, educational or benevolent enterprises not under the control of public authority."²

These provisions not only ensure all the subjective aspects of religious freedom, i.e. the freedom to believe, not to believe, convert, worship, organise, and spread religious beliefs, but also enshrine its objective and institutional aspects, i.e. a strict separation between state and religion, similar to the state secularism that exists in France.

However, these provisions have not always been present in Japan's history or constitutional texts. The 1947 constitution, which is in stark contrast to the former Meiji constitutional charter, is aimed at creating an ideal liberal and peaceful democracy in a country crushed by military defeat and atomic bombs. By postulating the natural and inviolable rights of the individual, the authors of the constitution established religious freedom as the basis of the spiritual independence of every Japanese citizen. In doing so, their objective was to bring an end to Japanese subjects' blind obedience to the Tennō, the emperor, which was closely intertwined with state-sanctioned Shintoism (jinja). The question needs to

be asked whether it has proved possible to reconcile principles of religious freedom with Japanese tradition.

According to Japanese legal scholars³, the constitutional jurisprudence of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s has, thanks to the continuing efforts of various civic movements, safeguarded religious freedom and the principle of a secular state. Many claims of unconstitutionality have gone before the courts. It has divided public opinion. All this explains why, for example, state financial aid for the Shinto shrine of Yasukuni⁴ has become legally and practically impossible. A 1997 ruling by the Supreme Court has made it very difficult for a prime minister or a cabinet minister to take part in an official act of worship.

At a less political level, there are no laws or other regulations requiring religious groups to register with the government. However, the status of a religious organisation can be of interest for tax purposes as it exempts donations and offerings from all taxes as long as they are intended to finance the running costs of the religious organisations to which they have been made. The status of a religious organisation is granted by the authorities when a community can prove that it has a place of worship and that its main purpose is to provide religious education, conduct religious ceremonies, as well as train and teach believers. According to the Agency for Cultural Affairs, the competent authority in this field, some 181,400 religious organisations were registered as of 31st December 2014, a high number due to the fact that each Buddhist or Shinto temple must register separately.

Incidents

Incidents are rare and in most cases fall into the same categories. They concern in particular prisons and prisoner access to religious worship and the objects necessary for their religious life. Prison chaplains do exist; the authorities list nearly 1,900 prison chaplains for Buddhism, Shintoism and Christianity – but regulations and discipline are so strict in Japan's detention centres that the religious freedom of detainees can be hindered. For example, in 2014, the Tottori prison administrators did not allow a Christian inmate in solitary confinement to take a Bible with him. The Tottori Bar Association requested on 27th April 2016 that the detainee's religious rights be respected and that he be given access to a Bible, but the prison administration responded by noting that regulations for detainees placed in solitary confinement do not provide for access to books.⁵

On a different note, in May 2016, the Supreme Court upheld a ruling handed down by a lower court imposing the payment of 90 million yen (€ 675,000, US\$ \$769,000) to 17 Muslims in compensation for the violation of their privacy by excessive police surveillance. However, the court did not find that the plaintiffs' constitutional right to religious freedom had been violated.⁶

Another case highlights a particular aspect of what could constitute the start of serious violations of the religious freedom of Japanese citizens. On 19th July 2016, a Tokyo court ruled in favour of a former Christian elementary school teacher. In 2010, the teacher had refused to play the national anthem at a ceremony organised by the school on the grounds

that the references to Shinto worship in the national anthem violated her religious beliefs. In the lower and appeal courts, the teacher had lost her case and the salary deductions imposed by the regional education authority had been declared legal. Therefore, it was only at this last stage that the teacher was able to assert her rights, as the court recognised that her attitude had been dictated by her religion; however, the court also found that the order she had been given to play the national anthem was constitutional.⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

Although the Japanese continue to view their institutions, including the courts, as the guarantors of the democratic nature of their national political life, the ideology of the current government is a source of concern. The authorities' stated approach raises the possibility that some constitutional freedoms may be eroded even if they are not denied outright. People close to Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, who has been in office since 26th December 2012, have advocated constitutional reform and the installation of a new 'regime' for today's Japan. Shinzō Abe – who has a majority in both houses of the Japanese Parliament – said that the 1947 Constitution was “an act of contrition of the vanquished to the victor”, noting that the country's fundamental text should “be elaborated by ourselves”. He has made no secret that he is seeking a “departure from the post-war regime”.⁸

Constitutional scholars note that the constitutional reform bill promoted by the conservative wing of Shinzō Abe's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is not only about Article 9 (Japan renounces war as means of settling conflicts),⁹ but also touches on relations between the state and religious groups, patriotic education, as well as the fundamental rights of citizens. If they had their way, the constitution would no longer be a charter designed to guarantee the rights of citizens vis-à-vis the state but would rather become a tool to broaden and maintain the authorities' scope for action. If the risk of reviving state Shintoism as it was in the 1930s until 1945 is low, the questioning of fundamental freedoms may have an impact on freedom of religion.¹⁰ Should that happen, Japan would then be in direct contradiction with human rights protection as enshrined in the United Nations Charter, which Tokyo has signed and ratified.

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time important Japanese political figures come to pay their respect. The shrine includes a museum, the Yūshūkan, which features historical artefacts and explanatory panels describing Japan's military history. Its museographic approach has been criticised as being nationalistic, revisionist, and biased.

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JORDAN

RELIGION



- Muslims: 94,5%
- Agnostics: 2,5%
- Christians: 2,2%
- Others: 0,8%



AREA

89.318km²

POPULATION

7.748.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Since it was established, the Kingdom of Jordan has been ruled by members of the Hashemite dynasty from Mecca. The Jordanian rulers claim to be direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. From 1948, Jordan controlled East Jerusalem and the West Bank until Israel conquered the territories in 1967, the latter was the reason why many Palestinian refugees went to the Kingdom. A considerable number of Palestinian refugees had already gone to the Kingdom after the establishment of Israel. Nowadays, the majority of its citizens are of Palestinian origin. Only a minority belong to the traditional Bedouin inhabitants of the area. In 1994, Jordan made a peace treaty with Israel. The peace treaty confirms the Jordanian King's rights as Custodian of the Holy Places in East Jerusalem. Relations between Sunni Muslims and Christians in Jordan are usually peaceful. The Christian community praises the Royal Family for fostering a spirit of tolerance. The Catholic Church is present with parishes and institutions such as Caritas Jordan. There are Christian and Hindu migrant workers, mainly from Asia, temporarily living and working in the country.

According to article two of the country's constitution¹ of 1952, "Islam is the religion of the State". Article six states that "Jordanians shall be equal before the law with no discrimination between them in rights and duties even if they differ in race, language or religion." Article 14 obliges the state to "safeguard the free exercise of the rites of religions and creeds in accordance with the customs observed in the Kingdom, if such is not inconsistent with public order or morality." Article 28e says that "It is a condition for the person who shall ascend the Throne to be a Moslem, [...] and of Moslem parents."

Article 99 establishes civil, religious and special courts. Article 104 divides religious courts into Shari'a courts and the tribunals of other religious communities. All matters related to the personal status of Muslims are regulated by Shari'a law. Christians are subject to their respective ecclesiastical courts. Civil marriage does not exist. A Muslim woman cannot marry a Christian man. If a Christian woman converts to Islam, her Christian husband has to convert too if they want to remain married; otherwise, they are automatically divorced.

The constitution and laws do not explicitly ban Muslims from converting to another faith, and there are no penalties under civil law for doing so. Nonetheless, by according primacy

to Shari'a, which prohibits Muslims from converting to another religion, the government effectively prohibits both conversion from Islam and proselytising for another religion. According to Islamic law, there are consequences for Muslims when they adopt a religion other than Islam. For instance, if someone is convicted of apostasy, the Islamic courts adjudicating matters of personal status have the power to void the person's marriage and deny his or her right to inherit from their spouse and Muslim relatives.

Jordan explicitly criminalises blasphemy. Article 273 of Jordan's Penal Code of 1960 states that any individual who insults the Prophet Mohammed is liable for a term of imprisonment of one to three years.²

Christians are represented by quota in Parliament and have access to higher ranks in the government and the army. The proportion of Christians in the country has been declining for half a century, with various estimates indicating that today the figure is just over two percent of the population, down from 20 percent in 1930.³

Officially recognised Christian denominations include the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic (Melkite), Armenian Orthodox, Maronite Catholic, Assyrian, Coptic, Anglican, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist and Presbyterian Churches. Some Christian Churches (such as the Free Evangelical Church, Nazarene Church, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) are not officially recognised but registered as "societies". The United Pentecostal and the Jehovah's Witnesses are among the unrecognised Christian denominations which are not registered as "societies". Chaldean and Syriac Christians among Iraqi refugees are referred to as "guests" by the government. The Baptist Church, registered as a "denomination", does not enjoy the full privileges of other registered denominations in the country.⁴

Incidents

On 25th September 2016, prominent Jordanian writer Nahed Hattar was assassinated outside a court in Amman. From a Christian family but known for his atheistic views, Hattar was on trial facing charges of inciting sectarian strife and insulting Islam by sharing an "offensive" cartoon.

The day following his assassination, hundreds of Jordanians, many Christians among them including Church leaders, liberal Muslims and community leaders, demonstrated near the Office of the Prime Minister in the capital Amman. They were asking the government to protect fully the rights and safety of minorities.⁵

Hattar had been arrested a month earlier after posting a cartoon on his Facebook account, titled, "The God of Daesh (Islamic State, IS)" with an IS militant sitting next to two women and asking God to bring him a drink. He removed the cartoon but insisted that he did not intend to insult Islam or question God's divinity in any way. He just wanted to show how the Islamic State "envisions God and heaven".⁶

Following the execution of a Jordanian Air Force fighter pilot by Daesh militants in 2015, which was not unanimously condemned by all politicians and religious representatives,

and at a time when hundreds of Jordanians were already in Iraq and Syria engaged with Islamist groups, the King called for reforming the contents of textbooks.⁷

These reforms were implemented in September 2016, and a number of schoolbooks were modified. But these changes sparked a lot of criticism from teachers as well as parents. These protests led to the establishment of a new evaluation commission and the teachers' union asked its members not to consider the changes and use instead the old textbooks.

Demonstrations and book burnings in front of the Education Ministry were relayed by Jordanian media, eventually reaching the international media. Some parents went so far as to accuse the government of wanting to encourage Jordanians to stop following the Prophet and his teachings. Others argued that the new programme was dictated by the Israelis to weaken the faith of Muslims. As a result, to counteract these changes, some teachers started giving additional classes in religion.⁸

In an article that appeared in a UAE paper, the spokesman for the teachers' association declared: "There are hidden powers that want to normalise the curriculum and globalise it so that the next generation will kneel down [succumb] to other cultures and to the enemy as well."⁹

One of the offensive images shows a man cleaning a house, a crucifix hanging on the wall behind him. Atef al-Numat, a member of the teachers' union, called the changes "a disaster for our children and our values". For him, Jordanian men do not clean their homes, and the crucifix is a "clear message" that "conversion is possible".¹⁰

In an interview with the National Catholic Register, Father Nabil Haddad, a Melkite Greek Catholic priest, said that people need to realise that religion must be used to build peace and understanding in the region. Although it is considered to be a holy land, "the mentalities and minds are not the minds of peace and change."¹¹ Talking about the new Pope Francis Centre in Amman for inter-religious dialogue, he said that it is meant to give the voice of Christianity. "We want to use this centre as a platform that brings the Good News and hope at a time when there is so much blood, so much killing, and every crime is justified by a certain religious agenda."¹²

At a meeting held in December 2017, Christian religious and lay leaders said that the Christians of Jordan and Palestine see King Abdallah II, the Custodian of Muslim and Christian holy places in Jerusalem, as their protector.

King Abdallah II met Christian religious leaders from Jordan and Jerusalem at Christmas and the New Year at the site of Jesus's baptism (Bethany beyond the Jordan).¹³

During a visit to Jordan in May 2017, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said: "Christians are the past, present and must be the future"¹⁴ of the Middle East. He visited refugee camps and met Christian refugees from Iraq and Syria.

Speaking about Syrian refugees, Mohammad Momani, Jordan's Minister for State Media Affairs, said in August 2016 that their overall figure in Jordan is close to 1.3 million, or almost 20 percent of the country's population.¹⁵

Prospects for freedom of religion

Jordan, in common with many other Islamic countries in the Middle East, does not grant full religious freedom to its citizens. Converts from Islam to Christianity face considerable social resistance and legal consequences, especially in matters of personal status. Churches are also prevented from preaching the Gospel to Muslims or actively pursuing their conversion. The King and other members of the Royal Family are in favour of religious tolerance and have expressed this in words and deeds. The monarch welcomed thousands of Christians from Iraq and Syria to his country. Relations between the traditional, officially registered Churches and the government are excellent. Non-registered Churches face problems, however. A matter of concern is the high number of Jordanian Muslims who are in favour of radical Islamic ideas or who have joined jihadist groups in neighbouring Syria.

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KAZAKHSTAN

RELIGION



- Muslims: 69,5%
- Christians: 26,1%
- Agnostics: 3,4%
- Others: 1%



AREA	POPULATION
2.724.902km ²	17.855.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Religious activity in the country is governed mainly by the Law on Religion, which came into effect in 2011. The legislation bans all unregistered religious activities. In September 2016, a new Ministry of Religious Affairs and Civil Society was created, which became responsible for the formulation and implementation of state policies on religious freedom and the fight against extremism.¹ After two attacks by alleged extremists in mid-2016 in Aqtobe and Almaty, there was a new government drive towards drafting and approving anti-terrorism legislation.

The UN Human Rights Commission and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) expressed concern in 2016 that the overly broad definition of extremism in Kazakh law “unduly restricts” religious freedom. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) urged Kazakhstan “to ensure anti-extremism laws do not serve as a pretext for infringement of the right to peaceful religious observance and expression”.² Yet, despite this, the legislative changes of the past two years seem to move towards increased restrictions of religious liberty.

While some anti-terrorism amendments introduced in December 2016³ have increased restrictions on those who travel abroad for religious reasons and made censorship more stringent, the legislative change that causes most concern is the bill amending the Law on Religion of 2011 and other rules, formally presented in Parliament on 29th January 2018.⁴ The proposed law, in addition to introducing a new process of re-registration for almost all religious communities,⁵ entails stricter rules and penalties for religious education, clearly indicating where it can take place and who may give it. It imposes new punishments for those who disturb the internal peace of a religious community, and adds further limitations to proselytising, with a specific ban on mentioning unregistered religious organisations. It also calls for the confiscation of all religious material that does not meet government regulations. Among the issues that are a source of concern is the new definition of a member of the “clergy” as an individual formally appointed by a registered religious organisation to perform “spiritual and preaching service”.⁶ This definition could limit the number of people allowed to speak of their faith and to whom conscientious objection to compulsory military service would be permitted.

Another significant change will affect minors aged under 16. In their case, parental consent will no longer be sufficient to attend a religious service; instead, the physical presence of at least one of the parents will be necessary. The new law also bans “signs showing adherence to destructive religious movements, including external attributes and items of clothing”,⁷ such as certain types of long beards as well as any form of clothing that hides the face. Kazakhstan already banned the hijab from schools in January 2016, despite criticism from some parents who refused to send their daughters to school.⁸

The new bill also gives police and district officials more powers to monitor the religious activities of individual citizens and groups.

With few exceptions, only graduates of Kazakh religious schools can study in foreign religious schools.

The state will make grants to organisations offering measures to prevent religious extremism and terrorism, including centres that “help those who have fallen under the influence of destructive and extremist religious movements”.⁹

Finally, as a measure intended to safeguard the state’s secular character, state officials cannot be founders or members of religious associations.

Incidents

Despite indications of inter-faith dialogue and steps towards greater religious diversity, in the period under review acts of persecution have increased, especially against minority and non-traditional groups.

The Catholic Church, with its 90 communities,¹⁰ operates without particular restrictions, thanks to a special agreement signed between the Holy See and the Kazakh State.

As regards the Orthodox Church, for the first time, an Orthodox priest, Vladimir Vorontsov, was indicted on charges of holding prayer meetings with his community in a recreational mountain camp, and therefore not in a recognised place of worship. Rev Vorontsov was acquitted at the end of the trial.¹¹

In 2017, at least 279 administrative trials were carried out against people, religious communities and charitable institutions for exercising their right to free religious expression.¹² Of these, 258 resulted in sanctions, brief periods of detention, permanent or temporary bans on religious activities, deportations, seizures and destruction of religious literature. The main victims were Muslims, Protestants, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. The fines averaged between three weeks and six months of the average salary (between 79,415 and 680,700 Kazakhstan tenge in 2017, or US\$ 259 and US\$ 2,125).

About a third of the sanctions were imposed for violations of paragraphs 9 and 10 of Article 489 of the Administrative Code. The first punishes the leaders of the religious group; the second goes after participation in the activities of unregistered religious groups. Paragraph 1 of Article 490 punishes the violation of established procedures to

perform rites, ceremonies and religious meetings. Moreover, based on what is allowed under the revised Administrative Code of 2015, about a quarter of the sanctions were imposed directly by the police at the end of raids carried out during religious services, without a prior court order.¹³

Some of the people affected by these actions are elderly pensioners. The most glaring case concerns Yegor Prokopenko, an 89-year-old Baptist, who on 22nd May 2016 was fined an amount equal to almost three months of salary of the average worker¹⁴ for holding a prayer meeting at his home.

Four foreign nationals were ordered to be deported, but two were able to overturn the court's decision on appeal. One was Indian businessman Daniel Gunaseelan who was mistakenly considered pastor of Almaty's Source of Life Church, when in fact he was just a member and, as such, authorised to attend the service.¹⁵

Courts have sometimes punished religious groups for holding unauthorised meetings by banning religious activity for a certain period of time. In four cases, the ban was applied to entire religious communities, which were not allowed to carry out any activity for three months. In two cases, the measure was imposed for carrying out religious activity in an unregistered place. This is what happened, for example, in August 2017, to the New Life Protestant Church in Oskemen after its members sang religious hymns at a summer camp. The judge likened singing to performing a religious service. In Almaty, a court banned Jehovah's Witnesses from using their centre for three months because the 25 surveillance cameras they had installed to comply with the law left three small areas without coverage.¹⁶

Another 100 fines of between US\$259 and US\$2,125 were imposed for distributing or selling religious material. In some cases, the court ordered the destruction of the seized material.¹⁷

Thirty people were fined for sharing their faith with others.

In 2017, at least seven administrative cases were initiated, five of which ended with fines against religious leaders who had allowed the children or grandchildren of community members to be present at or participate in religious rituals without first checking whether another parent had objections.¹⁸

In May 2017, a Jehovah's Witness called Teymur Akhmedov was sentenced to five years in prison in Astana in connection with Article 174 (Part 2) of the Penal Code, which punishes incitement to interreligious hatred. His crime was that he spoke to others about his own faith. In 2016 Akhmedov had agreed to meet with some students, who later turned out to be informants for the secret police, after they expressed interest in the teachings of his religion. Mr Akhmedov, who was diagnosed with cancer, was also banned from performing any religious activity for three more years after he completed his sentence.¹⁹ Asaf Guliyev, another Jehovah's Witness, who was present at the meetings, was sentenced to five years' probation.²⁰

On 31st October 2017, a court in Akmola sentenced Yuri Bekker, a Baptist, to a year's probation for refusing to pay fines he had received as a result of engaging in unregiste-

red religious activities, plus the costs of expert analysis of the religious texts found in his possession. Failure to pay the fines and debts would result in his house being seized.²¹

Muslims too face considerable obstacles in exercising their freedom of religion. The Hanafi school of Sunni Islam is the only form of Islam allowed. It is recognised by the Spiritual Association of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK), the body governing the activities of more than 2,500 registered Muslim groups. The Association is responsible for the construction of new mosques and the appointment and confirmation of imams. In November 2016, the SAMK approved a new regulation for the internal organisation of mosques, banning, among other things, the use of the word “Amen” in mosques: 21 Muslims were fined for contravening this new regulation.²²

The terrorist danger and article 174 of the Penal Code have often been used to justify the forced closure of independent mosques and repressive measures against political opponents or ordinary Muslims who adhere to other Islamic schools or traditions.

Many people have been convicted on terrorism charges and links to Daesh (ISIS), with sentences of up to 12 years in prison.²³ Many Salafists, who have been blamed for violent attacks in 2016, were arrested on charges of extremism and terrorism.²⁴

Among non-traditional Islamic movements, the most affected is Tabligh Jamaat – a missionary movement originally from India which was banned as “extremist” in February 2013.²⁵ Since December 2014, 60 people have been convicted for membership of the group,²⁶ 18 in 2017, with sentences of up to three years in prison, to which were often added bans on performing religious activities for a certain period of time after their release.²⁷

Five Sunni Muslims who stayed in Saudi Arabia, one to work and four to study, were convicted in 2017 for “inciting religious hatred”, with sentences ranging from four to eight years.²⁸ The crime alleged in some of these cases was simply speaking to other co-religionists about Quranic teachings or criticising the SAMK.²⁹

In addition to the courts, the fight against terrorism has also taken other paths. These range from preventive action in educational institutions, raising awareness via the E-Islam website and the work of the Akniyet rehabilitation centre for radical detainees³⁰ to blocking websites suspected of spreading extremist and terrorist propaganda³¹ as well as sending theologians to go into prisons to curb the spread of radical ideas among prisoners.³² The Minister of Religious Affairs and Civil Society, Nurlan Yermekbayev, also expressed his willingness to set up a Kazakh educational institute for moderate Islamic studies³³ to reduce religious illiteracy and make believers less vulnerable to foreign religious ideologies.³⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

Ruled by Nursultan Nazarbayev since 1991, Kazakhstan has tried to showcase itself to the world as a major international player. In 2017 it became a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Its capital, Astana, has hosted meetings in connection with peace negotiations over the Syria crisis and Astana has been offered as a venue for the resolution of other conflicts. Since 2003 Kazakhstan has organised the Congress of Lea-

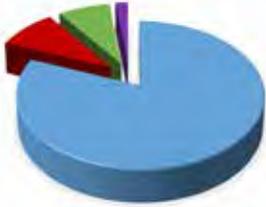
ders of World and Traditional Religions, a forum for inter-religious dialogue held every three years. Conversely, Nazarbayev's focus on the "economy first, politics after" has left the country without free elections, with politically motivated legal actions against civil society activists and a low tolerance for freedom of speech. Religious groups, especially non-traditional ones, have been victimised, not only by more repressive laws, but also by a growing number of administrative and criminal proceedings against them in connection with a war on terrorism in which many are innocent victims caught in the crossfire. All the signs indicate that the right to free religious expression will progressively become more restricted.

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RELIGION



- Christians: 81,1%
- Ethnoreligionists: 9,1%
- Muslims: 7,9%
- Others: 1,9%



AREA	POPULATION
591.958 km ²	47.251.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 32 of the constitution of Kenya sets out the rights pertaining to freedom of conscience, religion, belief and opinion. All citizens are allowed to worship, practise, teach or observe their beliefs, which includes having a day of worship according to their faith. Personal or professional discrimination as well as coercion on account of religion is prohibited.¹

Kenya has had a very lively debate about the legal aspects of religious freedom. During the period under review, the country has seen some contentious issues come up on matters of religious freedoms and their legislative regulation. Professor Githu Muigai, Kenya's former Attorney General (2011-2018), has played an important role in such controversies since 2016.

At the beginning of 2016, Professor Muigai announced that new provisions were to be added to the Religious Societies Rules of 2015. The new regulations were aimed at exercising tougher control on religious groups. Academic credentials would be required of preachers or church leaders.² Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta decided to withdraw the proposed regulations a few weeks later following complaints from certain groups and a meeting with religious leaders.³ At present, the Religious Societies Rules are on hold.

Attorney General Muigui and President Kenyatta have also disagreed over a moratorium on the registration of religious organisations, issued in November 2014 following suspicions of radicalism among religious societies. The Attorney General was in favour of the moratorium, which was reiterated in an official statement from his office in February 2017.⁴ One month later, President Kenyatta lifted the ban, contradicting the Attorney General's position on the matter.⁵

The group called Atheists in Kenya – advocates for the cause of atheists and agnostics – was first registered in February 2016 but was suspended two months later by the Office of the Attorney General, which had received complaints from the public regarding its activities and pronouncements. The group challenged this suspension by filing a case before the High Court, and in January 2018 the High Court overturned its deregistration.⁶ Thereupon, the group demanded the resignation of the Attorney General, who eventually left office in February 2018 for reasons unknown.⁷

Regulation of the right to wear the veil (hijab) for Muslim women has been a controversial topic, especially given the inconsistency of the government's legal decisions on the matter. In September 2016, the Kenyan Court of Appeal ruled that female Muslim students were allowed to wear the veil in educational institutions (including Christian facilities). This ruling overturned a previous High Court decision in March 2015. In addition, some members of independent African Churches such as the Akorinos, whose members wear turbans (men) and veil (women), claimed that the ruling allowed them to keep their mandatory dress code too. They have often complained about discrimination in public offices, schools and institutions.⁸ Despite official rulings, controversies around this topic have continued in a number of educational institutions where the leaders defy regulations.⁹

Social tensions in the Coast Province, due to police harassment of leaders of Muslim groups, have subsided somewhat, partly because the main concern of security agencies in recent years has moved from jihadist terrorism to the political opposition following tensions surrounding Kenya's last two presidential elections.

Violent actions by members of the Somali-based Al-Shabab group, especially in the north and the east of the country, continue, however, and are still a serious threat to the general population, especially to outsiders and non-Muslims who live and work in those regions. This is also because the group keeps using religion as an excuse for political and propaganda purposes and targets non-Muslims or non-Islamic institutions.

Nonetheless, the intensity and number of Al-Shabab attacks on civilians seem to have dropped considerably in the last two years. Massive counter-terrorist measures by security agencies, some of which were described by various human rights organisations as unlawful, now appear to be less frequent. In fact, the security services and the armed forces have yet to be held accountable for quite a few unresolved cases of extrajudicial killings, torture, ill-treatment of detainees and disappearance of individuals in coastal areas.¹⁰ Some organised gangs seem to have profited from the failures of the security agencies in the Coast Province and are now engaged in criminal activities and in serious human rights violations.¹¹

In comparison with previous years, the general situation of religious freedom in the country seems to have improved slightly. However, we must stress that groups and associations fighting for active citizenship, human rights and civil liberties continue to be targeted by police and the security forces. Their activities have often been disrupted by government officials on questionable grounds while their leaders complain that they are subjected to constant intimidation.¹²

Incidents

An explosive device was found on 5th June 2016 at the Kianyaga Catholic Parish Church, Kirinyaga (Central Province), shortly before the Sunday religious service. More than 500 worshippers were evacuated and the bomb was later safely detonated by special police

units. According to the county commissioner, this was the fifth attack against Christians in that particular county.¹³

Two serious attacks on civilians were reported in October 2016 in Mandera County (North Eastern Province). In total, 18 persons were killed by Al-Shabab militants. Reportedly, in both cases, the targets were non-Muslims and the goal was to expel them from the region.¹⁴ Attacks and killings by Al-Shabab units continued in regions close to the Somali border.¹⁵ Allegedly, the strategy of this group is to target outsiders working in those areas on the assumption that most of them are Christians. School teachers particularly speak of discrimination since they do not feel protected by security forces. They do not feel supported by the authorities when they ask for a transfer because of security threats.¹⁶

An explosive device was thrown from a moving car at St Michael's Catholic Parish in the town of Mandera (North Eastern Province) on 26th November 2017. Fortunately, the bomb exploded close to the church's perimeter wall. Nobody was injured in the attack.¹⁷

A Catholic priest from Kisumu Archdiocese (Nyanza Province), who had previously made a public appeal to the Kenyan government to stop the killings in the region, was assassinated by unknown attackers on the eve of the presidential elections.¹⁸

The proto-cathedral of Marsabit in (Eastern Province) was attacked on 13th January 2018 by young demonstrators after the arrest of a Muslim leader accused of having links with Al-Shabab. Three people were killed during the unrest and the temple's guard sustained minor injuries. Until then, the town had not experienced any tensions between Muslims and Christians.¹⁹

A school principal and 35 students from a renowned secondary school in Nairobi were injured in January 2018 after a fight broke out between Christian and Muslim students over alleged religious discrimination in the use of common facilities such as toilets and the school library. The school was closed until further notice and four students were charged with assault causing bodily harm.²⁰

In April 2018, two churches and some houses were burnt by police in Laikipia (Rift Valley Province).²¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

At present, nothing suggests any radical change in the way freedom of religion is handled by the government or experienced by ordinary Kenyans. There have been some slight improvements in the general situation. Terrorist attacks in the North Eastern Province against Christians seem to have abated as has their virulence, which could point to a certain fatigue in the use of religion as a political weapon. However, the critical situation of insecurity will continue as long as Al-Shabab is able to hold on to its Somali bases while operating within Kenyan territory.

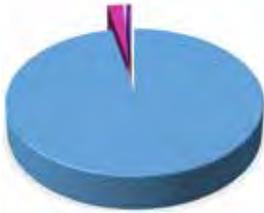
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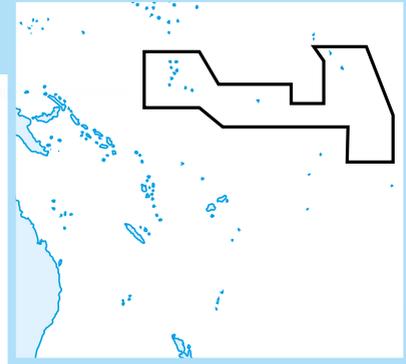
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KIRIBATI

RELIGION



- Christians: 96,8%
- Baha'is: 2,4%
- Others: 0,8%



AREA

726km²

POPULATION

114.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Kiribati is a group of 33 coral atolls and one raised coral island in the Pacific Ocean. The capital, Tarawa, is about halfway between Hawaii and Australia. With a population of a little over 110,000, Kiribati is a small nation with a total land area of 726 square kilometres.

Under the constitution no person's enjoyment of freedom of religion shall be hindered. Religious groups are entitled "both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate [their] religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance".¹ The right to freedom of religion may be curtailed by law if that is "reasonably required in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health", provided that the curtailment is "reasonably justifiable in a democratic society".² Every religious community is entitled to establish and maintain places of education and to manage any place of education which it wholly maintains. Religious instruction is not compulsory in schools and parents may withdraw their children from it.

There is a registration system for religious communities with memberships of 2 percent of the population or more. A request must be submitted to the Ministry of Women, Youth and Social Affairs, together with evidence of the number of members of the community. However, organisations which fail to register are not penalised in practice.

Many citizens in the northern islands converted to Christianity under the influence of the British and American missionaries who travelled there in the late 1800s. With the arrival of Europeans, Christianity became indigenised and is now an integral part of Kiribati culture. In 2015, the census showed that just over 57 percent of the population were Catholic,³ with the majority living in the northern islands. The Kiribati Protestant Church dominates in the southern islands. There are also small numbers of Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as adherents to Islam and the Bahai faith.

The Preamble to the Constitution acknowledges "God as the Almighty Father in whom we put our trust",⁴ and most government and other official functions begin with a Christian prayer. The country's public schools allow various religious communities to provide religious education, including Catholics, Methodists and Mormons. Students may opt

out of religious education. The government administers grants to registered religious organisations.

Everything suggests that the government does not interfere with the constitutional right to freedom of religion.

Incidents

Few significant incidents have been reported since 2016. According to virtually every source, the government upholds its commitment to religious freedom and reports of social tensions arising from religious belief are scarce. The residents of two islands (Arorae and Tamana) maintain a “one church only” policy.⁵ Residents who are not Protestant worship in their own homes and are discouraged by villagers from proselytising or holding meetings. This tradition has not given rise to any complaints. The Kiribati Protestant Church collaborates with the Roman Catholic Church in a mission to seamen.⁶

Prospects for freedom of religion

There is nothing to suggest that the situation of religious freedom in Kiribati will change any time soon.

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KOSOVO

RELIGION



- Muslims: 93,1%
- Christians: 5,9%
- Others: 1%



AREA

10.908km²

POPULATION

2.095.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Republic of Kosovo is, according to the country's constitution, a secular state and is neutral in matters of religious belief. The constitution also protects and guarantees freedom of religion. Article nine of the constitution states that the republic "ensures the preservation and protection of its cultural and religious heritage". Article 24 guarantees the equality of all and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion. Article 38 guarantees freedom of belief, conscience and religion. Article 39 enshrines the protection of religious denominations.

The basic Law on Freedom of Religion in Kosovo came into force on 1st April 2007.¹ The law has been heavily criticised both by religious communities and international organisations. The lack of clear regulations on registration and financing as well as on construction of religious sites and creation and maintenance of graveyards are of major concern to religious communities.

At the end of 2011, the government proposed amendments to the law intended to help solve the registration problem. Five religious communities are deemed by the draft law to "constitute the historical, cultural and social heritage of the country". These will automatically be registered.² The faith communities in question are the Islamic Community of Kosovo, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, the Jewish Community and the Evangelical Protestant Church. The draft law³ provides that the Office for the Registration of Religious Communities, acting within the Ministry of Justice, shall issue registration certificates to these five religious communities, and provide them with the status of legal persons.

New religious communities can be registered if they have at least 50 members.⁴ The Office for the Registration of Religious Communities is required to make a decision within 30 days of receipt of a request for registration.⁵ A negative decision can be appealed before the competent court within 30 days. Those religious communities which do not meet the conditions for registration will not have legal recognition.

The Council of Europe's Venice Commission published its view on the amendment of the Law on Freedom of Religion outlining the need for a number of improvements. These included expanding the list of religious communities that "constitute the historical, cultural and social heritage of the country" from five groups to include all other established religious groups.

The tiny community of Catholics in Kosovo, estimated at 60,000, is mostly concentrated in Gjakova, Prizren, Klina and a few villages near Pec and Vitina. There are 33 Catholic churches, 36 priests and 70 religious Sisters. There is great pride that Saint Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa) was Albanian. The main boulevard in Pristina and a Catholic cathedral are named after the nun who heard her calling to join the mission in the church of Letnica, in south-east Kosovo. Saint Teresa's canonisation by Pope Francis in 2016 was celebrated by Albanians all over the Balkans. For a long time before this, Catholic and Muslim Albanians promoted Saint Teresa as Mother of all Albanians.

Although 18 years have passed since the Kosovo conflict, its legacy casts a long shadow over relations among Kosovan inhabitants. According to the International Commission for Missing Persons report from 2017, 4,500 people disappeared during the war, more than 1,600 of whom remain missing.⁶ Inter-ethnic tensions between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs continue.

It is believed that around 315 Kosovo citizens have travelled to war zones in Syria and Iraq which makes Kosovo Europe's biggest contributor of foreign fighters to Daesh (ISIS) per capita. According to intelligence officials, more than 33 percent have already returned.⁷

Incidents

Many of the relevant incidents arise from religious tensions related to land and property disputes, as well as allegations of foreign interference in the promotion of a particular religious viewpoint.

On 17th September 2017, after two years of litigation, Kosovo's Court of Appeal ruled against Pristina University and granted the Serbian Orthodox Church land ownership rights to Christ the Saviour Church. The construction of the church was initiated by the Milosevic regime in the mid-1990s on land previously owned by Pristina University. It has remained unfinished since the war for independence in Kosovo ended in 1999.⁸

Allegations of renewed interference from abroad sometimes relate to the construction of religious buildings, including the construction of the Pristina Central mosque. The mosque has still not been built in spite of the cornerstone being laid in the city district of Dardania back in 2012.⁹ Even though 17 architectural plans were submitted, none of them were accepted by the Islamic Community of Kosovo. Later on, the Islamic community accepted the architectural plans submitted by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), which appeared to be the main donor for the project, worth more than €40 million. Some Pristina politicians and civil groups have strongly opposed the architectural plans. According to them, the Osman style architecture is a copy of the Turkish Edrene mosque and completely out of keeping with the existing Dardania District Neighbourhood Settlement Plan.

In December 2017 a statement by the newly elected Deputy Mayor of Pristina, Selim Pacolli, brought new heat to what was already hot topic. During a television interview, he supported building a mosque on the campus of Pristina University provided the university was relocated to the countryside. The Pristina City Administration said it did not support Pacolli's proposal. A student organisation, Student Democracy, expressed concern about the deputy mayor's

alleged plan “to turn the university campus into an Islamic centre”.¹⁰ Outrage in response to this proposal took the form of graffiti at the university campus threatening Kosovan President Hashim Thaci over plans to build a new mosque in the capital. According to Fox News, the Kosovo police were investigating the case. The Islamic Community of Kosovo has invited students not to be influenced by individuals who call for violence, defamation and intolerance.

This is not the only mosque that provokes strong reactions in Kosovo. According to Balkan Insight, more than 100 mosques have been built without permission in the past 10 years.

In September 2017, the Kosovo President Hashim Thaci officially visited the Vatican. He presented the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to Pope Francis. The commission’s ultimate goal is to encourage mutual forgiveness among Kosovan Albanians and Serbs. The commission was established in February 2017.¹¹

On 15th February 2017 anti-Serb graffiti appeared in several places close to the Serbian Orthodox church in Gnjilane, as well as on the road to the Serbian village of Donja Budriga.¹²

In June 2017 Florim Neziraj, the Head of the Islamic Community in Kacanik (a town in the southern part of Kosovo), was dismissed from his post after announcing the death of Daesh leader Lavdrim Muhaxheri over the local mosque’s loud speakers.¹³ The general public has strongly condemned his behaviour. The self-proclaimed Kosovan Daesh commander was killed in Syria in a joint Russian and Syrian operation. According to local sources, 24 men from this town had joined jihadi groups in Syria and Iraq. As a result, Kacanik gained a reputation as the jihadist capital of the Balkans.

On 23rd March 2018, the Basic Court of Pristina liberated the imam of Pristina’s Grand Mosque Imam Shefqet Krasniqi. In 2014, he had been arrested together with 11 imams from local Kosovan mosques. In 2016, the Special Prosecution accused him of inciting terrorism by encouraging young Kosovars to go to Syria and Iraq, inciting hatred and tax evasion.¹⁴

On 5th September 2017, Pope Francis’ special envoy, Cardinal Ernest Simoni, an Albanian, consecrated St Teresa’s Roman Catholic Co-Cathedral in Pristina.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

The extreme poverty, high unemployment, and influx of money from Saudi Arabia are seriously threatening to convert a European-oriented, tolerant Muslim society into a haven for Islamic extremism.

The self-proclaimed protector of Islam in the Balkans, Turkey’s President Erdogan, is becoming increasingly interested in spreading his political and Islamic agenda in Kosovo. Millions of Turkish lira are being used to build dozens of new mosques. Ankara has demanded the revision of the Kosovo history textbooks in order to present Ottoman rule in a more sympathetic light.

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KUWAIT

RELIGION



- Muslims: 86,4%
- Christians: 8,8%
- Hindus: 3,4%
- Others: 1,4%



AREA

17.818km²

POPULATION

4,007.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Located in the Persian Gulf, Kuwait is ruled by the Al Sabah, a Sunni Muslim dynasty. The majority of the country's citizens adhere to Sunni Islam. There is, however, a large Shi'a minority of around 30 percent.¹ They theoretically enjoy full political rights but have experienced a rise in harassment in the aftermath of the 2003 outbreak of hostilities in Iraq and the 2011 uprising in Bahrain.² According to local sources, Christians include both Protestants and Catholics. There are also Baha'is who hold Kuwaiti citizenship. Kuwait is thus among the few Gulf countries that allow non-Muslims to be citizens. Naturalisation for non-Muslims, however, is not possible.³

The number of non-citizen residents in the country is much larger than the number of citizens. Among foreigners, Muslims, both Sunnis (number unknown) and Shi'as (around 150,000), constitute the biggest group. Then come an estimated 600,000 Hindu residents and around 450,000 Christians.⁴ Figures regarding religious demography vary considerably. According to the latest statistics released by the Public Authority for Civil Information, more than 822,000 Christians live in Kuwait. However, the overwhelming majority of them are non-citizens. There are just eight Christian families official declared as citizens – a total of just over 200 people.⁵ Together with Bahrain, Kuwait is the only Gulf Cooperation Council country to have a local Christian population holding citizenship.⁶

Seven Christian denominations have official recognition, namely the Latin-rite and Greek Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic Churches, the National Evangelical Church and the Anglican Church. Other Churches enjoy de facto recognition.⁷

The Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination in Kuwait. According to local Catholic sources, there are around 350,000 Catholics belonging to different rites.⁸

Kuwait was the first member of the Gulf Cooperation Council to establish diplomatic ties with the Holy See in October 1968. It was only in the year 2000, however, that the Apostolic Nunciature opened in Kuwait.⁹

The Kuwaiti constitution of 1962, reinstated in 1992 after the Iraqi occupation, states in article 2: "The religion of the state is Islam and Islamic Law shall be a main source of legislation."¹⁰ Article 12 declares: "The state shall maintain the Islamic and Arab heritage and shall share in the path of civilisation and humanitarianism." Article 29 guarantees equality: "The people are peers in human dignity and have, in the eyes of the Law, equal public rights and obligations. There shall be made no differentiation among them because of race, origin, language or religion." Article 35 states that freedom of belief is unrestricted: "The state shall protect freedom in the observance of religious rites established by custom, provided such observance does not conflict with morals or disturb public order."

According to the 1984 Law 51 on Personal Status,¹¹ which is based on Shari'a (Islamic law), under article 18, the marriage of a non-Muslim man to a Muslim woman is invalid. Under article 294 of the same law, apostates cannot inherit from their Muslim relatives or spouse.

Kuwait also has laws to punish individuals accused of blasphemy. The 2012 Law 19 on National Unity¹², which amends article 111 of the Penal Code, imposes stricter penalties. It also criminalises the publication or the broadcast of content that could be deemed offensive to religious sects or groups. Penalties include fines ranging from US\$36,000 to US\$720,000 and up to seven years in prison. Non-citizens who are convicted are subject to deportation. Under the country's blasphemy legislation, anyone can file criminal charges against an author of material deemed defamatory on religious grounds.

Religious groups can apply for registration but the process is said to be lengthy and not transparent. Registered religious groups are allowed to rent space to worship. Only citizens can purchase land. Registered groups can bring clergy and religious personnel from abroad. In Christian schools, catechetical instruction is forbidden, although this can be taught in private homes or in church compounds. In private schools, Islamic instruction is mandatory for Muslim pupils. This applies even if there is only one Muslim pupil present. Christian pupils do not have to attend.¹³

The law does not allow non-Muslims to proselytise among Muslims.¹⁴

Eating, drinking and smoking are forbidden during Ramadan. This applies also to non-Muslims. It is punishable by a fine and/or imprisonment for one month.

Incidents

In April 2016 Sheikha al-Jassem, a well-known female academic and human rights activist, was charged with blasphemy.¹⁵ Reacting during an interview on Al-Shahed TV to a question about radical Islamists who had said that they consider religion more important than Kuwait's constitution, the professor of philosophy at Kuwait University declared that, in her opinion, politics and religion should be kept apart. She said: "You cannot compare the two [the constitution and the Qur'an]; none are superior over the other. Each has its own place." She added that the constitution relates to the state of Kuwait while the Qur'an is a book for Muslims.¹⁶ Although the charges were later dismissed,¹⁷ Sheikha al-Jassem was subject to private intimidation and a public campaign against her. She told the BBC:

“They were terrifying me – everywhere, not just from Kuwait, even from Saudi Arabia.” Some called for her expulsion from Kuwait University. The general prosecutor eventually decided “that freedom of speech cannot be restrained and not every discussion on religious matters is blasphemy. Therefore, both complaints [have been] dismissed.”¹⁸

In August 2017, a new incident stirred up Shi’a-Sunni tensions again, but from a neighbouring country, Saudi Arabia. Following the death of renowned Kuwaiti actor Abdulhussein Abdulredha, Dr Ali Al Rabieei, a Saudi cleric, tweeted: “Muslims are not allowed to pray for Abdulredha because he was an Iranian denier [of Sunni Islam], who died misguided. God forbade Muslims from wishing mercy and repentance for unbelievers.”¹⁹ These declarations caused outrage in Kuwait, and Kuwaiti intellectuals issued a statement calling for legal action against Dr Al Rabieei for his “abusive words against the sanctity of the deceased.”²⁰ Dr Al Rabieei was summoned for interrogation by the Culture and Information Ministry and urged to delete his comment and apologise. Dr Al Rabieei did eventually apologise but retorted that he would only accept punishment if it was proven that his comment contradicted religious scripture and edicts made by senior Saudi Islamic scholars.²¹

Tensions between Sunni and Shi’a are recurrent. Although there has been no major terrorist attack, the regional situation has an impact on Kuwait’s Shi’a minority. In 2016, a group of more than 20 Shi’as, all but one of them Kuwaitis, were found guilty of belonging to a cell linked to Iran and Lebanon’s Hezbollah.²² The death sentence given to the “cell leader” was subsequently commuted to life imprisonment.²³ More recently, in July 2017, 14 Shi’a Kuwaitis convicted of belonging to a cell linked to Iran and Hezbollah fled to Iran after the Supreme Court overturned their acquittal by the appeals court.

In November 2017, Kuwaiti authorities arrested Pastor Shibu Mathew. He was accused of having spoken out against Islam while participating in interfaith dialogue involving Christians and Muslims.²⁴ He has subsequently been released²⁵ and has left the country.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

Religious freedom in Kuwait remains limited to the freedom of worship. Regional tensions between Sunnis and Shi’as do have a great impact on Kuwait, and on its Shi’a community.

Although religious equality is upheld in the constitution, non-Muslims are in effect penalised by the country’s legal structure and culture. Christian catechesis is banned in schools, a non-Muslim man cannot marry a Muslim woman, non-Muslims can be fined or jailed for failing to keep the Ramadan fast and the threat of blasphemy charges is still very strong.

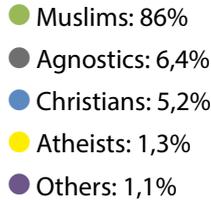
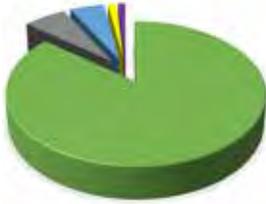
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KYRGYZSTAN

RELIGION



AREA	POPULATION
19.900km ²	6.034.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Kyrgyz constitution provides the right to freedom of conscience and belief.¹ However, the law on religion, which came into force in January 2009,² provides a much more stringent regulatory framework for the various religious communities: state registration is mandatory, religious groups can request it by submitting a list of at least 200 founding members; various limitations are envisaged for missionary activity, religious education, and the dissemination of religious material; proselytising is forbidden. The right to conscientious objection is recognised.

Some worrying amendments to the already restrictive 2009 law on religion, prepared by the State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA) and approved by the government on 11th April 2017, have come before Parliament. According to the new proposals, the minimum number of members necessary for the registration of a religious group would be raised from 200 to 500, a system of censorship which would cover all religious literature is envisaged, and sharing religious ideas in public would be prohibited.³

The Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court declared Article 10-2 of the existing law on religion unconstitutional, which requires religious groups to conduct activities only at their registered address and for local councils to approve the list of the names of the 200 founders. However, the article in question is still in force since Parliament has not yet implemented the court ruling. This was evinced by another Supreme Court decision rejecting an appeal by Jehovah's Witnesses against the SCRA's refusal to register four of its communities.⁴

In May 2016, the Kyrgyz Parliament adopted amendments to the law on fighting extremism, broadening the range of punishable activities to include activities such as clicking 'like' on certain online contents.⁵ In April 2016, the Kyrgyz president signed into law a bill that would keep convicted terrorists separate from other prisoners, in order to prevent the spread of extremist ideas in the country's prisons.⁶

Kyrgyzstan has introduced criminal liability in the case of marriage with minors celebrated in accordance with Islamic tradition, with three to five years in prison for the celebrant, the adult spouse, and the family members of the underage spouse.⁷

In December 2016, a referendum approved constitutional changes which strengthened the authority of the Prime Minister and Parliament at the expense of the presidency also removed the section that required Kyrgyzstan to take measures in cases where human rights bodies confirmed that human rights violations had occurred in the country.⁸

Incidents

The greatest difficulty for religious communities, especially for small ones and those seen as non-traditional, is obtaining state recognition, and therefore legal authorisation to carry out their religious activities. The main obstacle in this process is getting the signatures of 200 founding members, especially since these groups tend to have few members to start with. Then there is their fear that providing personal information might bring them to the attention of the authorities and law enforcement agencies. Another major source of difficulty for members of small communities, especially if they are converts from Islam, is the strong social opposition they face. They have endured many acts of reprisal including losing jobs, administrative penalties,⁹ threats of divorce and expulsion from their villages.¹⁰ A number of places of worship have been damaged in attacks; for example, in Kaji-Sai, a village in the northern part of the country, a Baptist church was almost destroyed by arson. Its members, about 40 ethnic Russians and Kyrgyz, have had to endure threats and persecution.¹¹ In the city of Tokmak another Christian church was vandalised in July 2017 – the attackers daubed graffiti such as: “We will kill you”, “Don’t teach our children”, and “Allah”.¹²

Interring the bodies of members of minority groups remains an unresolved problem as a result of strong opposition from local residents and Muslim clerics. Several cases have been reported in the last two years.¹³ The most notable one concerns Kanygul Satybaldieva, a convert to Christianity who died on 13th October 2016 in the district of Ala-Buka, southern Kyrgyzstan. Her family were forced to bury her three times after her body was repeatedly disinterred.¹⁴ Local government and Islamic authorities did not allow her burial in the village cemetery, next to her dead parents. The family assented to lay her to rest in a nearby cemetery, but a group of 30 local residents dug the body up, and – with the police, local government officials, and Muslim clerics present – put it out with the rubbish as a show of contempt and warning against those who reject Islam. The same thing happened when her family tried to bury the body a second time. Finally, Satybaldieva’s body was buried in the mountains, in a place known only to the family and to local authorities. Only five of the 70 people involved in the case were subject to criminal proceedings, resulting in four convictions with suspended sentences and one acquittal.¹⁵ The controversies surrounding interment have led the SCRA to come up with a plan to divide the country’s cemeteries into different sections according to religion.¹⁶

As in other Central Asian nations, the attitude of the Kyrgyz state towards Islam is a difficult balancing act between support and control. If, on the one hand, the growth of religious feelings and commitment in the population is seen as a positive factor in boosting national identity; on the other, it raises fears of possible radicalisation and consequent spread

of Islamic extremism.¹⁷ The fight against extremism has taken various paths in Kyrgyzstan. The state, together with the Spiritual Administration of Kyrgyz Muslims (Muftiat), has sought to promote moderate schools of Islam. At the same time, imams must send monthly reports to the local Muftiat, detailing the content of their sermons, and provide information about their congregations.¹⁸ Recently, various imams have been tested to certify their level of preparation. Some madrassas have been closed in the past year because they lacked the requisites to obtain a licence to carry out educational activities.¹⁹ Kyrgyz President Atambayev also reiterated the importance of the educational system in the strategy to counter religious fanaticism.²⁰

Members of Yaqyn Inkar, an Islamic movement declared extremist in June 2017 and consequently banned, were arrested in June 2016 and October 2017.²¹

Last year, the Kyrgyz Parliament approved a list of 20 terrorist organisations published by the State National Security Committee of Kyrgyzstan.²²

Prospects for freedom of religion

On 15th October 2017, Kyrgyzstan held its first peaceful transfer of presidential powers. Backed by outgoing President Almazbek Atambayev, former Prime Minister Sooronbay Jeenbekov won the presidential election outright²³ campaigning on a platform of continuity with the previous administration.

The climate that has developed over the past year – with many of Atambayev’s political opponents and critics tried and convicted²⁴ and increasing government and court pressure on independent media²⁵ – has raised growing concerns among international observers about the fate of Kyrgyzstan’s young democracy. According to the Nations in Transit 2017 report by Freedom House,²⁶ Kyrgyzstan is ranked as a “consolidated authoritarian regime”, a categorisation in which it was last placed in 2011.

At present, however, the tense political climate does not appear to have directly affected religious freedom. Yet, mistrust and social aversion towards members of minority religions remain strong, especially if their members are former Muslims.

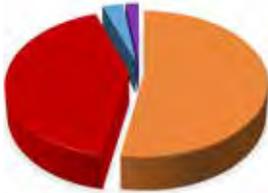
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RELIGION



- Buddhists: 52,8%
- Ethnoreligionists: 41,9%
- Christians: 3,2%
- Others: 2,1%



AREA	POPULATION
236.800km ²	6.918.000

Legal framework on religious freedom and actual application

Freedom of religion and belief is enshrined in the laws of Laos. The 1991 constitution, revised in 2003, describes in detail the rights of the people, and freedom of religion is listed first.¹ In practice, however, attitudes towards religious freedom in Laos are in many respects similar to those of its neighbour, Vietnam, no doubt because of the ideological proximity between the two Communist parties in power in Vientiane and Hanoi. The system can be described as one of petition and concession, in which religious organisations seek permission from state authorities to carry out certain and the secular authorities, in turn, grant or deny their requests.

The system is based on Decree 92 on “religious practices”, ratified in 2002, which governs all religious matters in the country. This statutory order was replaced on 16th August 2016 by Decree 315. Signed by Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith, the new decree deals with “the governance and protection of religious activities” in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.² There is little information about the practical application of this new rule, though the general philosophy of the ruling regime’s religious policy is not likely to change. Even though religious freedom is enshrined in the constitution, the above-mentioned decrees cover procedures that allow the state to control and interfere in the religious sphere. The government recognises four religious groups: Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and Bahá’ís. Among Christian groups, the authorities have granted administrative recognition only to the Catholic Church, the Lao Evangelical Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In Laos religious affiliation tends to follow ethnic boundaries. About 55 percent of the population of Laos is ethnically Lao, the majority of whom are Buddhists. The Lao dominate national political life and Laotian political leaders belong de facto, at least culturally, to Theravada Buddhism. The direct consequence of this strong Buddhist influence is that, despite 40 years of officially communist rule, the constitution, as well as decrees 92 and 315 contain a number of exceptions for Buddhism. In practice, this means that Buddhist monks and pagodas are not subject to the same restrictions as members other religions and other places of worship. At the national level, this closeness between Buddhism and the state means that Sangkharat, the supreme patriarch of Buddhism in Laos, maintains

close ties with the country's political leaders. Likewise, in the provinces, it is not uncommon for government officials to invite Buddhist monks to bless new buildings.

Consequently, the vast majority of restrictions on religious freedom affect primarily religious minorities, most notably Protestant Christians who make up less than 1 percent of the population.³ They also affect the country's 48 ethnic minorities, who constitute about 45 percent of the population. The lack of freedom of information and strict government control of the media make it difficult to obtain accurate information about violations of religious freedom in Laos. Persecution of Protestant Christians occurs mostly in rural areas. Conversion to Christianity can provoke hostile reactions from local animists who perceive Christianity as a "foreign element" likely to upset the protecting spirits of the village. To preserve "harmony" and avoid public disturbances, government authorities tend to be harsh with Christians, periodically forcing recent converts to declare their allegiance to ancestors and animist spirits.⁴ The authorities' attitude varies greatly from one province to another, with the most repressive policies implemented in the more remote and isolated areas.

Incidents

On 8th September 2015, a Protestant clergyman, Rev Singkeaw Wongkonpheng, from Chompet District, Luang Prabang Province, northern Laos, was stabbed to death by several men who had broken into his home. According to a report on the incident by the Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom (HRWLRF), local villagers suspect the attackers wanted to kidnap the pastor and his wife because of their proselytising activities. One of the attackers, who was wounded and hospitalised, may have been a police officer. The pastor was killed during the attempted abduction.⁵

Also in September 2015, HRWLRF reported that, in Savannakhet Province, a Christian with diabetes died in prison from lack of proper treatment. The married father of six, Mr Tiang, from Huey, a village in Atsaphangthong District, was arrested and convicted in February 2015, along with four other Christians, for "illegally practising medicine". Mr Tiang was sentenced to nine months in jail and a heavy fine for praying at the bedside of a dying woman.⁶

According to the NGO Portes Ouvertes, on 21st May 2017, a student at a Bible school, a member of the Hmong ethnic group, was arrested by police on charges of spreading the Gospel on his way to a Christian meeting in a neighbouring village.⁷ According to the same NGO, on 2nd December 2016, a national holiday in Laos, police arrived in a village in Luang Prabang Province and rounded up local Christians. The seven Christian families living in the village were forced to hand over their official papers (title deeds, family registration certificates, identity cards) to the police, who then expelled them.⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

Although the full scope of Decree 315 has yet to be fully evaluated, it appears that the government's religious policy will not change much in the short term. The ruling regime will not radically alter its ways as long as its Vietnamese and Chinese neighbours do not

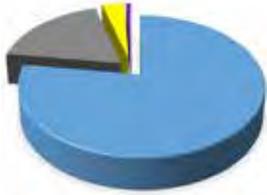
modify their own religious policies. However, a positive sign came on 11th December 2016 when the local Catholic Church in Vientiane organised the beatification ceremony of 17 of its martyrs.⁹ The ceremony was a very delicate matter since the martyrs (11 priests – one Laotian and ten French – plus six lay people) were killed between 1957 and 1975, most notably by the Communists now in power. The local Church cautiously portrayed them as “ancestors in the faith”, avoiding the use of the term “martyr”.¹⁰ However, until the last moment, Church leaders believed the authorities might ban the ceremony. Instead, government officials did attend the ceremony, including a senior official with the Lao Front for National Construction. In his address, at the end of the beatification Mass, the senior official emphasised that religions of whatever description work to build the nation. Bishop Louis-Marie Ling Mangkhanekhoun of Paksé, who became a cardinal on 21st May 2017, described as historic the fact “that the Church was able to beatify some of its martyrs in the capital of a country still ruled by a Communist regime”.¹¹

Endnotes

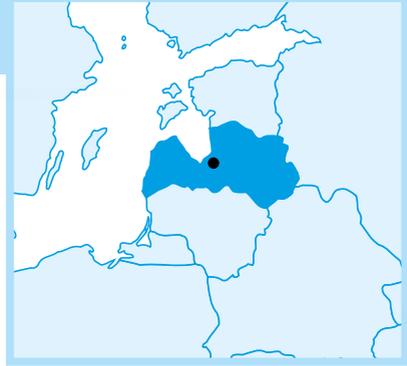
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LATVIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 77,3%
- Agnostics: 18,5%
- Atheist: 3,5%
- Others: 0,7%



AREA

64.573km²

POPULATION

1.956.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 99 of the Latvian constitution guarantees “freedom of thought, conscience and religion” as well as the separation of state and Church.¹ Limits to this are defined as any acts that threaten public safety, welfare, morals and the rights of others. Eight religious groups – Lutherans, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Old Believers, Baptists, Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jews – enjoy some special privileges. These include the right to offer religious instruction in public schools and to officiate at marriages without a civil marriage licence. Latvia’s Ecclesiastical Council, an advisory body chaired by the prime minister, meets periodically to discuss religious issues and to advise the government. Recommendations made by the Council are not legally binding. Only the eight groups mentioned above are represented.²

The 1995 Law on Religious Organisations regulates questions concerning the registration of religious bodies.³ Religious groups are not required by law to register, but doing so provides them with certain rights and privileges. These include legal entity status for owning property, conducting financial transactions and providing tax benefits for donors. Registered religious groups are permitted to conduct religious activities in hospitals, prisons and military units. With the agreement of local authorities, they may also hold services in public places such as parks and public squares. If an unregistered group carries out any of these activities, it is subjected to a fine. In order to register, a religious group must have at least 20 members over the age of 18 recorded in the population registry. Should the registration of a religious group pose a threat to human rights, democracy or public safety, the Ministry of Justice has the right to deny the application. The law requires religious groups to register each year for the first ten years.⁴ This condition has been criticised by representatives of some religious groups as onerous, especially for those groups that have been present in the country unregistered for many years. Foreign missionaries may only receive a residence permit, hold meetings or proselytise if they are invited by registered domestic religious groups.

The law in Latvia permits halal and kosher slaughter.⁵

In 2016 the Latvian Parliament adopted a law banning the Islamic full-face veil. Government sources justified the decision as a preventive measure directed at future migrants, even though almost no one wears the full-face veil in Latvia.

Incidents

There have been no reports of anti-Semitic or anti-Muslim incidents to the Ombudsman or the Ministry of Justice. Leaders of both the Jewish and the Muslim communities have however cited instances of hate speech on-line, mostly comments on social media or readers' comments to news articles. For the ICCL, Islamophobia is an issue, primarily because of widespread anti-immigrant sentiment. Members of the Muslim community itself, mostly Latvian converts to Islam, did not encounter problems with discrimination.⁶

According to Russia Today, Latvian authorities have at times shown a lenient attitude towards the swastika, a Nazi symbol that is highly offensive towards its victims. One such case occurred during the Christmas season in 2017, when a huge swastika was displayed as a Christmas decoration on the front of a house in Saldus, a town in western Latvia.⁷

In 2016 the leadership of the Islamic Cultural Centre in Latvia (ICCL) criticised the delay of the opening of a new prayer centre, calling it unwarranted and discriminatory. In a statement, the Riga City Construction Board said this was due to a failure to meet fire and safety requirements. The issue remained unresolved from February 2016 until the end of the year.⁸ According to the homepage of the ICCL, the new building is now in use.⁹

In the same year, Latvian Security Police reported that the trend towards radicalisation among some Muslims seen in the rest of Europe had not spared the community in Latvia.¹⁰ Over the past few years, the authorities have identified more people with extremist tendencies, including individuals who expressed the intention of joining the terrorist group Daesh (ISIS). According to the police, Latvian society nevertheless remains very moderate when compared to those of other EU countries, with, at best, only small radical fringe groups.

An ICCL representative told the press that a "sense of alienation" could be a reason that some Latvian Muslims had left for Syria to join Daesh. According to the security police, fewer than 10 Latvians enrolled in the terror group in 2016. There have been no official updates since then. In Riga, worshippers at a local mosque told the media that radicalisation was strongly discouraged.¹¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

As elsewhere in Europe, there is a worrying trend towards radicalisation among some Latvian Muslims. This is being closely monitored by the police and strongly discouraged by Islamic religious authorities. For now, the overall situation remains stable for Latvia's various religious communities.

Endnotes

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LEBANON

RELIGION



- Muslims: 61,4%
- Christians: 32,2%
- Agnostics: 3,3%
- Buddhists: 2%
- Others: 1,1%



AREA
10.452km²

POPULATION
5.988.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

There are roughly equivalent numbers of Sunni and Shia Muslims in Lebanon, who together make up just over 60 percent of the population. Lebanon has the highest percentage of Christian citizens in the Arab world. There are 18 officially registered religious communities. The biggest Christian group is the Maronite Church. There is also a Druze minority. The Alawite minority lives mainly in the northern city of Tripoli, and there is also a very small number of Jews.

As a result of the massive influx of displaced Syrians, the resident population is estimated to be as high as 5.9 million with perhaps one in five being a refugee.¹ Most of the latter are Sunni Muslims, but tens of thousands of Syrian and Iraqi Christians have also sought refuge in Lebanon. There are no exact figures since a substantial number of refugees are not registered with the United Nations.

About 450,000 Palestinians are registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).² They are almost entirely Sunni Muslims.

Lebanon is a parliamentary republic which has no official religion but is not formally a secular state. The political system is denominational and reserves the highest political offices to the various communities according to well-defined criteria: the presidency of the republic falls to a Maronite Christian, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers to a Sunni Muslim and the Parliamentary speakership to a Shia. Religious communities are represented in Parliament according to fixed quotas.

Lebanon's constitution provides for freedom of religion.³ According to article seven, "all Lebanese are equal before the law." Article nine states that "freedom of conscience is absolute". It continues: "In assuming the obligations of glorifying God, the Most High, the state respects all religions and creeds and safeguards the freedom of exercising the religious rites under its protection, without disturbing the public order. It also guarantees the respect of the system of personal status and religious interests of the people, regardless of their different creeds."

Article 10 says: "Education is free so long as it does not disturb the public order, does not violate the morals, and does not touch the dignity of any religion or creed. The rights of communities to establish their own private schools cannot be violated, provided that they comply with the general requirements laid down by the state with respect to public education."

The Lebanese Penal Code punishes individuals who perform acts that are considered blasphemous to the name of God.⁴ It also imposes criminal penalties on individuals who publicly insult the religious practices of any religion.⁵

Conversion from one religion to another is legal but converts can face strong social resistance. Missionary activities and proselytism are allowed.⁶

Matters of personal status private law (such as marriage, parentage, inheritance) are dealt with under the separate jurisdictions of each of the 18 religious communities recognised by the state (12 Christian, five Muslim and one Jewish). Each community possesses its own jurisdiction and manages its own welfare organisations and educational institutions. However, certain religious communities within Lebanon (Yezidis, Baha'is, Buddhists and Jehovah's Witnesses) are not legally recognised and therefore have no rights as institutional groups. Members of these groups are nonetheless permitted to perform their religious rites freely. Members of non-recognised religious communities and those of no religion may contract a civil marriage abroad, after which their union is validated in Lebanon.⁷ But, where this course is pursued, the law relating to their marriage and its effects are those of country where their civil marriage was celebrated. Despite attempts by some civil society and human rights groups,⁸ civil marriages are not allowed in Lebanon, except for people who opt out of the religion-based family registry.⁹

Incidents

Local bishops have warned that religious tensions have been exacerbated by the influx of refugees. Maronite Archbishop Simon Atallah from Deir Al Ahmar told Aid to the Church in Need that, in some cases, Muslims from Syria, especially Sunnis, have vandalised Christian symbols in acts that the Christian population considers blasphemous. The Archbishop said: "They defile crosses, statues of the Virgin Mary, and so on. Anti-Christian slogans have also been painted on walls. This leads to tensions in the region."¹⁰

A further concern is the security problems caused by Sunni extremists from Syria who have found refuge among their co-religionists in Lebanon. Archbishop Attallah commented: "The Lebanese Shiites are in favour of the Syrian regime, but the Sunnis are on the side of Daesh [...]. In the region where I work there are some Sunni villages such as Aarsal and others. The Sunnis provide an inviting environment for Daesh. The members of Daesh can therefore penetrate into the region and find refuge among the Sunnis."¹¹

In October 2017 a group of independent Shias created a movement called "Lebanese first, Shia second" to oppose Hezbollah and counteract the predominant and expanding hegemony of the Iranian-backed party.¹²

In December 2017, during a historic trip to Saudi Arabia, following an official invitation by Saudi authorities, the Primate of the Maronite Church, Patriarch Bechara Rai, met with King Salman, Crown Prince bin Salman and Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri who was in Riyadh at the time. The Patriarch declared that “[Lebanon] must remain a meeting ground. It must avoid entering armed conflicts so that it can always play the role of an element of stability and peace.”¹³ In this unprecedented visit, during which he was received with honours reserved for a Head of State, he also declared that “Hezbollah is one of the Lebanese Parties. It is the only party that has weapons, and this creates a problem. But we cannot call it a terrorist organisation.”¹⁴

Controversial land purchases by Shia businessmen, mostly affiliated with Hezbollah, worry certain communities, mainly the Christians and Druze. According to them, “this demographic ‘nibbling’ raises fear in communities that see ‘hidden agendas’ in the [behaviour of] others in [a country without] a clear social contract and a strong state.”¹⁵ More generally, many believe that Iran is trying to create a Shia belt.

In February 2018 a crisis broke out over the funding of private schools, which cater for 66 percent of all school-age children in Lebanon.¹⁶ The government had increased the pay scales for staff in both the private and the public sector, and the private schools said that they were unable to meet the demands of the new salaries. This crisis affects above all the network of Catholic schools, which are widely thought to be best in the country.¹⁷ They represent 70 percent of the private school network and are open to all communities.¹⁸ The crisis became an open conflict between two of the country’s leaders, namely the Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri¹⁹ and the leader of the predominantly Maronite Free Patriotic Movement,²⁰ Gebran Bassil. Patriarch Bechara Rai firmly condemned the row, declaring that “this is not the way to build a self-respecting state that wants to regain its central place in the Arab world.”²¹ According to Patriarch Rai, the state was under an obligation to subsidise private schools: “private schools, like public schools, which are governed by the same laws, must be financed in the same way.”²² Patriarch Rai pointed out that private schools provide a public service, and the new pay scale introduced by the government had weakened them to the point of endangering their existence. “It is up to the state to assume the consequences [of the increase in pay scales] and subsidise it.”²³ For some religious leaders, the salary increase amounts to a discriminatory measure against Catholic private schools.

After almost 10 years, parliamentary elections were finally held but with a low voter turnout. Despite the new voting law,²⁴ less than half of eligible voters cast their ballot, thus confirming that there is a “widespread distrust towards politicians, often considered as being all corrupt.”²⁵ Overall, the mostly Shia Hezbollah party gained support, consolidating Iran’s influence in the country. Together with its allies (principally the Amal movement), it gained a small majority in parliament.²⁶ The Hezbollah-Amal victory will most probably raise regional and inter-confessional tensions.²⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

More than three years ago, Maronite Archbishop Simon Attallah expressed fears that the shift in the country's demographic balance, resulting from the large number of Syrian refugees, would put the future of Lebanon's Christians in doubt. His words are still valid. The former Maronite Archbishop of Baalbek-Deir Al Ahmar expressed his concerns during an interview with Aid to the Church in Need in March 2015. "We have two million Syrians in the country as refugees. Many will return to their homeland when the war is over. But many refugees will remain in the country and apply for Lebanese citizenship in 10 years. What will become of us Christians then?"²⁸ asked Archbishop Attallah. "Lebanon is marked by a very delicate religious composition. Those Syrians who will remain in the country are mostly Sunnis. And the religious balance will thus be destroyed. That is a problem for us."²⁹ The prelate added that his remarks should not be misunderstood as showing a lack of solidarity with the refugees. "We show much solidarity. We want to act in solidarity. But we have obvious problems before our eyes. There is a question mark over our future."³⁰ More recently, in an interview given to the Lebanese newspaper L'Orient-Le Jour, Monsignor George Sabila, Syriac Orthodox Bishop of Mount Lebanon and Tripoli, declared that "Christians in the Middle East could disappear in a decade, even from Lebanon."³¹

Broadly speaking, the country's existing sectarian problems remain. The war in Syria and the recent tensions between Qatar and the other Gulf states have raised the pressure level in the country.

Endnotes

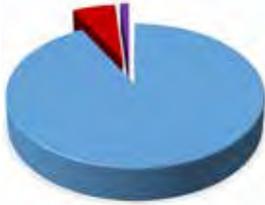
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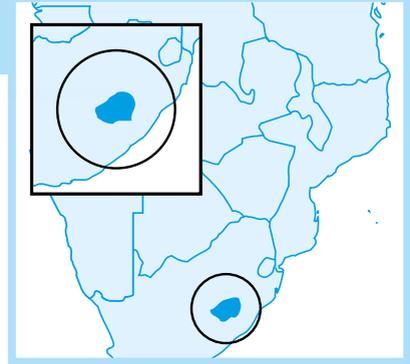
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LESOTHO

RELIGION



- Christians: 92,3%
- Ethnoreligionists: 6,4%
- Others: 1,3%



AREA	POPULATION
30.355km ²	2.160.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Christians constitute the largest religious community in the Kingdom of Lesotho. In terms of state policy, there are “no established requirements for recognition of religious groups... Most religious groups register, but there is no penalty for those that do not.”¹

Christian Churches are very active in the field of education; they operate around 80 percent of the country’s schools.² Instructors in these schools, however, are paid by the state, which also sets the standard curriculum.

The sponsors of denominational schools are mainly the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and the Lesotho Evangelical Church. Some schools are also run by the Methodist Church. Lesotho introduced free elementary education in the year 2000. A number of new state schools have been built, in some cases replacing denominational schools. However, the vast majority of schools are still in Church hands.

Lesotho is a constitutional monarchy; the head of state is King Letsie III. The country’s 1993 constitution guarantees its citizens fundamental human rights and freedoms (Article 4), including freedom of conscience, freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination, irrespective of the person’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion.³ Article 13 is devoted to individual freedom of conscience and explicitly states that these protections “includ[e] freedom of thought and of religion, freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.” The freedom of assembly, which also applies to religious meetings, is set out in detail in Article 16.

The human rights organisation Freedom House classifies Lesotho as a “free” country.⁴

Incidents

During the current reporting period, parliamentary elections were held on 3rd June 2017. The Catholic Church of Lesotho worked hard to ensure that the elections were conducted

democratically. The Justice and Peace Commission of the Lesotho Catholic Bishops' Conference, in cooperation with the Inter-Regional Meeting of Catholic Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA) stated: "The election was peaceful and well organised. Although some aspects could be improved, as the local Church we applaud the manner in which the election was held."⁵

There were no particular institutional changes or other events of note that would have had an effect on freedom of religion.⁶ In this liberal climate, the Catholic Church in Lesotho is free to work unimpeded to deepen the faith of its followers.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Lesotho is one of the poorest countries in the world and the country is repeatedly affected by drought.⁷ Wherever poverty prevails, religiously motivated tensions are often not far away. In this regard, it is not certain that good relations among religions will remain stable under increasing pressure.

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LIBERIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 41,6%
- Ethnoreligionists: 40,5%
- Muslims: 16%
- Agnostics: 1,6%
- Others: 0,3%



AREA

111.369km²

POPULATION

4.615.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The separation of Church and state and religious freedom is enshrined in the Liberian constitution.¹

Liberian law does not require religious communities to gain state registration.² However, registration is sought in most cases as these organisations receive tax exemptions and a waiver on import duties,

Private schools, many of which are run by Church or Islamic organisations, receive state financial support.³

Unlike other countries in the region, Islam is not dominant in Liberia, which was founded for the repatriation of former U.S. slaves. A significant proportion of the population are Christian⁴ but significantly people of one religion often follow the rites and customs of other faiths. Religious tolerance is broadly upheld by society at large. There are two major religious umbrella organisations: the (Protestant) Liberian Council of Churches and the National Muslim Council of Liberia.⁵

During the reporting period, Liberia (along with Guinea and Sierra Leone) has been recovering from a severe Ebola outbreak, which, by the time it was declared officially over in May 2015, had claimed more than 4,800 lives.⁶ The epidemic's impact was huge; Liberia returned to recession, the inadequate health care system deteriorated further, poverty and hunger remained acute. All these problems were made worse by an infrastructure still reeling from the civil war (1989-2003).⁷

The Ebola epidemic impacted religious practice and culture. The rapid spread of the virus and the extreme risk of infection prevented many people from burying their dead according to Christian or Muslim custom.⁸

Incidents

There were no constitutional amendments or serious incidents relating to religious freedom in Liberia during the period under review.

An initiative to enshrine in the constitution the notion that Liberia is a “Christian nation” sparked debate. Critics included former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as well as the Catholic Church, Baptists, Lutherans, and Muslim groups. However, some Protestant pastors spoke out in favour of the proposal.⁹

The status of Sunday as a holiday repeatedly leads to disputes between Christians and Muslims, with the latter claiming this unfairly privileges Christians.¹⁰

Prospects for freedom of religion

The effects of the election of the former national and world football player George Weah as the country’s president remain to be seen. Weah is now a Methodist. He was born into a Christian family but he converted to Islam before returning to Christianity.¹¹ He is recognised for working hard; he began life in the slums and went on to become a sports star and earn a university degree. Weah has called on religious groups to promote peaceful coexistence.¹²

Endnotes

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LIBYA

RELIGION



- Muslim: 98,7%
- Others: 1,3%



AREA	POPULATION
1.676.198km ²	6.330.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Since the demise of Muḥammad Ghaddafi's regime in 2011, Libya has been mired in a confusing situation. Following elections in June 2014, violence erupted between the internationally recognised government of Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni in the eastern city of Tobruk and the Tripoli-based General National Congress. After UN-led peace talks, the rival administrations signed an agreement in December 2015 to form a unified interim government. Under the agreement, a nine-member presidency council headed by Prime Minister Fayeẓ Sarraj and an interim "Government of National Accord" was to be formed to renew the state institutions and to hold elections within two years. The administration in Tripoli accepted the unity government in January 2016, but the Tobruk-based government refused to recognise the internationally recognised unity government. Violent extremist groups and terrorist organisations including Daesh (ISIS) have used the power vacuum and government inaction to expand their influence in Libya, and parts of the territory remain outside the government's control.

More recently, France proposed a plan for Parliamentary and Presidential elections to take place on 10th December 2018 with the intention of bringing an end to the political impasse.¹ In May 2018 the four key leaders, Fayeẓ al-Sarraj (Prime Minister of Libya's UN-backed government in Tripoli), Khalifa Haftar (the military leader of the east of the country), Aguila Saleh (the president of the house of representatives) and Khaled al-Mishri (the head of the council of state) endorsed but did not sign the agreement.² They also agreed that a constitutional basis for elections and electoral laws would be adopted by 6th September 2018.

Since 2011, Libya has been governed according to the principles of the Interim Constitutional Declaration promulgated on 3rd August 2011 by the National Transitional Council (NTC). It declares Islam to be the state religion and Islamic Shari'a law to be the principal source of legislation (article one). At the same time, it guarantees non-Muslims the freedom to practise their religion. Article six promotes the equality of all Libyans before the law. The temporary constitution prohibits any form of discrimination on the basis of religion or sect. This constitutional protection of religious freedom is the first of its kind in the country since 1969.

The ongoing fighting between the rival governments has restricted effective law enforcement. According to the US State Department's 2017 Human Rights report, neither prohibitions nor punishments are enforced and all kinds of discrimination occur.³ Furthermore, the forces in power have not prevented extremist groups from attacking religious minorities and sites and from imposing their own religious standards.⁴ Pre-revolution laws restricting religious freedom are still applied. Insulting Islam or the Prophet Mohammed as well as "instigating division" are punishable with a maximum penalty of death.

Human Rights organisations and the media have reported war crimes, torture and cruelties against migrants and refugees in Libya, and cited instances of abduction, sexual violence and abuse.⁵

Islamic religious education is obligatory in state-run schools as well as in private educational institutions. Other forms of religious education are not offered in schools. There are a number of non-Islamic places of worship in the country – including those of Catholics, the Russian, the Greek and the Ukrainian Orthodox, Evangelicals and followers of the Unity Church – but very few Christians remain in the country. Most of the Jewish population left the country between 1948 and 1967. Some Jewish families reportedly remained, but no estimate of the population is available. Non-Muslims are restricted in their right to worship; there are also restrictions on clergy who seek to come from foreign countries when they apply for visas or one-year residency permits.

The Catholic Church is present in various parts of Libya through three Apostolic Administrations and one Apostolic Prefecture. In February 2016, Pope Francis named Bishop George Bugeja OFM as Apostolic Administrator of Benghazi, and accepted the retirement of Bishop Sylvester Carmel Magro. Bishop Bugeja told Aid to the Church in Need that the Catholic Church does not have difficulties in celebrating its liturgies, as long as they are celebrated inside church buildings and the worshippers are foreigners. At the same time, Bishop Bugeja said the Catholic Church is pastorally very limited, as a result of the security situation in Benghazi and Sebha and the difficult financial situation caused by its main benefactors leaving the country.

In terms of Islamic worship in Libya, the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, a pan-African Islamic quasi-charitable organisation, has authority over the mosques, supervises clergy and ensures that religious practices conform to government regulations.⁶ This same body provides the imams with the texts of their sermons, which often contain matters of a political and social nature.

Observers say that the ongoing conflict is having a detrimental impact on both freedom of speech and the press. The temporary Constitutional Declaration provides for such freedoms, but the government limits the exercise of these rights. Self-censorship as a result of threats is present in all media sectors, according to the US State Department. Attacks on the media, including kidnapping, violence and killings, have become more serious and widespread. The freedom of the press declined over the reporting period.⁷ On the 2016 World Press Freedom Index, Libya had fallen ten places below its 2015 position and

stood at place 164 out of 180.⁸ The situation has only slightly improved since then, and the country now stands at place 162.⁹

Incidents

In an October 2016 report, Open Doors estimated that there were only 150 Christian Libyan nationals. As a result of the pressures they face, they are obliged to practise their faith in underground “house” churches.¹⁰

In November 2016 a Libyan man who converted to Christianity was arrested in the eastern city of Benghazi.¹¹ The man had been in contact with a fellow convert in Morocco who had been helping him, and was accused of “proselytising on social media and denigrating Islam”.¹²

In October 2017 the bodies were discovered of the 21 Christians (20 Egyptian Copts and one Ghanaian) who were beheaded in 2015 by jihadists linked to the Islamic State in a coastal area in the city of Sirte.¹³ In September 2017, the Libyan Assistant Public Prosecutor Assistant, al-Sadiq al-Sour, had announced that the authorities had arrested one of the Daesh militants who had been involved in the beheadings, namely the cameraman who videotaped the murders. He gave the Libyan authorities all the details about the killings and about the location of the bodies.¹⁴

In August 2017 the Constitution Drafting Assembly proposed a text for a new constitution that was rejected by the Supreme Ifta Commission (SIC), which is part of the Beida-based interim government’s Awqaf and Islamic affairs authority. The fact that the draft constitution allowed for freedom of thought, freedom to demonstrate, the right to form civil society organisations, and established equality between men and women was considered as unacceptable by the SIC. Although the draft text stated that Islam is the religion of the state and that Sharia is the source for legislation, it failed to define “legitimate controls” on freedom of thought and expression. According to SIC, this could open the door to blasphemy (insulting God, the Prophet and the Companions) and “encourage apostasy based on the freedom of belief and the unity of religions” by promoting a religion other than Islam.¹⁵

According to a Libyan researcher: “Forced labour and forms of slavery are widespread forms of abuse and persecution experienced by Christian men.” He furthermore added that “the form of persecution that occurs particularly to Christian women and girls is sexual assault and rape. In addition to the physical pain and injury that such attack causes on the victims, the trauma and emotional hardship it causes to their family, friends and fellow Christians is very high.”¹⁶

Prospects for freedom of religion

Freedom of religion, theoretically guaranteed by the temporary constitution, is limited in practice and has deteriorated over the period in question. Of key concern is a de facto ban on proselytism and the severe penalties that may follow. There has been an upsurge in killings of religious minorities, especially Christians and, linked to that, Islamic extremist

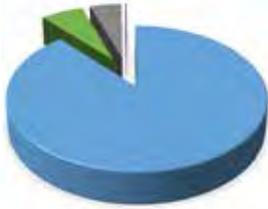
organisations have gained in influence. Because of political rivalry and the lack of a unified government, extremist organisations including Daesh are expanding and are controlling parts of the country. The inhuman treatment that (mainly sub-Saharan) migrants get in Libya is a matter of significant concern.

Endnotes

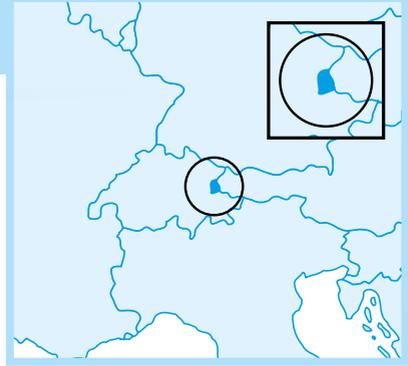
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LIECHTENSTEIN

RELIGION



- Christians: 88,6%
- Muslims: 6,4%
- Agnostics: 4,8%
- Others: 0,2%



AREA
160km²

POPULATION
37.800

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Liechtenstein, a small German-speaking state, is a constitutional hereditary monarchy with a democratic and parliamentary form of government headed by the Prince of Liechtenstein. Liechtenstein has the highest gross domestic product per person in the world and is the second-richest country in the world (by measure of GDP per capita) after Qatar.¹

According to the latest data from 2010, Roman Catholics make up 76 percent of the population. Members of the Evangelical Reformed Church represent 6.5 percent.²

Most Muslims are Sunni and are mainly from Turkey, Kosovo, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.³ There are about 30 Jews in the country.

The constitution states that each person has the freedom to choose their faith (Article 37) and guarantees an equal enjoyment of civil and political rights for all (Article 39) but grants a privileged position to the Catholic Church (Articles 37 and 38).⁴

There is no law requiring religious groups to register with the State. Religious groups have the freedom to establish private associations, for which authorisation from the commercial registry is mandatory. If they register as such, they are eligible to receive government funding for a variety of activities, including the provision of religious education in schools.⁵

Religious education is required in primary and secondary public schools. In primary schools, Catholic or Protestant education is compulsory. That said, parents are permitted to apply to the Office of Education for exemption. The Catholic Church controls the Catholic curriculum largely independent of state intervention. Islamic education is also offered (but is not compulsory) in primary schools and is partly funded by the state's integration budget, with the Muslim community choosing the teachers.⁶

In secondary schools, parents and students are given a choice religious education. On the one hand they can opt for Catholic religious classes, which the government finances and the Catholic religious community organises. Alternatively, they can choose general classes about religion and culture taught from a sociological perspective.

Tolerance education has been of high importance in social, religious and cultural education. A course in religion and culture serves as an all-faith programme, including study of inter-denominational issues and the major world religions.⁷

Liechtenstein's criminal code prohibits public incitement to hatred or discrimination against religious groups or individuals, the refusal to serve a person or group of persons based on religious affiliation and membership in any association that aims to promote discrimination against religious groups or individuals.⁸

The slaughtering of animals without stunning is also prohibited by law, making ritual slaughter of animals for kosher and halal meat illegal. Importing halal and kosher meat is legal.⁹

To receive a residency permit, foreign religious workers must have completed theological studies, belong to a nationally-known religious group, and be sponsored by a resident clergy member of the religious group.

Incidents

No incident has occurred in the last few years. On the 4th and 5th July 2017, however, the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) questioned the close ties between the state and the Catholic Church.¹⁰ The Constitution of Liechtenstein defines the Catholic Church as the official state Church,¹¹ which is funded by the state and the country's municipalities. Religious minorities are set up as private associations¹² and must apply for state funding. In the review of the state report, the HRC expressed concerns¹³ regarding the impact that close ties between state and Church could have on the protection of freedom of religion as envisaged in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In its response, the delegation of Liechtenstein said that proposed amendments to the constitution are intended to give recognition to other communities provided they fulfil certain criteria, such as having a minimum number of 200 followers and having been present in Liechtenstein for over 20 years, and that they respect public order.

In its recommendations, the UN Human Rights Committee¹⁴ asked Liechtenstein to ensure that: "(a) efforts are redoubled to reach an agreement within outstanding municipalities in order to amend the Constitution; (b) funding is provided to religious organisations of all religious communities on a basis of equality and that such funding is not limited to efforts aimed at integration of minority communities; (c) the law grants equal rights to all religious and belief groups."

Prospects for freedom of religion

The population of Liechtenstein has slowly become more pluralistic over the last few decades. While Catholics made up more than 95 percent of the population in the 1930s and 1940s (and still about 90 percent in 1970), their share of the population has steadily declined since then (76 percent in 2010).

A reorganisation of the relationship between the state and the religious communities is being prepared. The planned reorganisation is intended to create a uniform legal basis for the relationship between the state and the religious communities, leading to equal treatment of all religious groups.

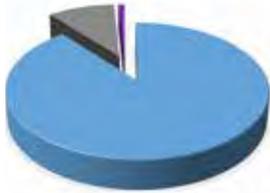
However, during the review by the UN Human Rights Council the delegation of Liechtenstein expressed regrets that progress towards the separation of state and religion is unlikely to happen in the near future. Central to this is that the country's municipalities are opposed to moves to disentangle properties jointly held by religious and state institutions.

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LITHUANIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 89,2%
- Agnostics: 9,9%
- Others: 0,9%



AREA	POPULATION
65.286km ²	2.850.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 26 of the constitution¹ stipulates that there is no state religion and provides for the right of individuals to choose freely any religion or belief, to profess their religion and perform religious rites, individually or with others, in private or in public, and to practise and teach their beliefs. It states that no one may be compelled – or compel others – to choose or profess any religion or belief. The constitution reserves the right to limit the freedom to profess and spread religious beliefs in order to protect health, safety, public order or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. Article 25 restricts freedom of expression if it incites religious hatred, violence or discrimination. Article 27 stipulates that religious beliefs may not serve as justification for failing to comply with laws.

Article 4 of the 1995 Law on Religious Communities and Organizations² defines religious groups as (1) religious communities, (2) religious associations, which are comprised of at least two religious communities under a common leadership and (3) religious centres, which are the governing bodies of religious associations.

Article 5 of the law recognises as “traditional” those religious groups that can trace their presence in the country back at least 300 years, listing nine “traditional” religious groups: Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Evangelical Reformed, Russian Orthodox, Old Believer, Jewish, Sunni Muslim, and Karaite. Traditional religious groups do not need to register with the government. They can perform marriages recognised by the state, set up joint private/public schools, offer religious education in public schools and benefit from public funds on an annual basis.³ The government contributes to social security and healthcare plans that benefit members of the clergy, monastic orders and religious workers who belong to traditional religious groups. The latter are also exempt from paying social and health insurance taxes for members of their clergy, monastic orders and most other religious workers.⁴

According to article 6 of the Law on Religious Communities and Organisations, other (non-traditional) religious associations may apply to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) for state recognition if they have been officially registered in the country for at least 25 years.⁵ The Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas) then votes whether to grant this status upon

recommendation from the MOJ. The Evangelical Baptist Union of Lithuania, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the Pentecostal Evangelical Belief Christian Union are the only state-recognised non-traditional religious groups.⁶

Religious groups must register if they want to open a bank account, own property and legally operate as a community. All registered religious groups can legally own property to use for various purposes such as prayer houses or homes, as well as apply for construction permits to build the facilities they need for their religious activities.⁷

Traditional religious communities receive public funds for the upkeep of their houses of prayer and other needs. This involves a base fund of EUR€3,075 (US\$3,240), as well as a variable component based on the size of each community.⁸

In 2018 the funds were nearly doubled over the preceding year. This points to greater governmental support for religious groups.⁹

Incidents

Anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim comments on the Internet were commonplace. There are recurring attacks on Jews for allegedly dominating the economy, controlling the United States or for believing that they are a chosen people. Muslims, on the other hand, have been linked to terrorism. It is possible that this may be the result of Internet trolls who have become increasingly active over the last few years. There are reports of civil volunteer groups forming to combat the rising tide of hate speech and misinformation on the Internet.¹⁰

In the NGO community, groups including the Institute for Ethnic Studies, as well as members of Lithuania's Muslim community, have reported a steady rise in anti-Muslim sentiment because of the ongoing influx of refugees.¹¹ Most of the several hundred refugees taken in under the European refugee relocation programme left the country for the higher benefits offered in Germany.¹²

In January 2018 the European Court for Human Rights declared the use of religious symbols in advertising as legal. It fined the Lithuanian government for punishing a company which had used images of Christ and Mary in their commercials in 2012.¹³

In October 2017 there was a public debate over the advertising by a newly opened branch of the German-based discount supermarket chain Lidl.¹⁴ The advertisement showed a view of the Lithuanian city of Kaunas, with all the Christian symbols, such as the crosses on tops of the numerous churches, airbrushed from the image. The reactions were mostly negative. The company said that it was unintentional, but, as several commentators observed, the German company has used the same marketing tactic to erase religious symbols from images in other countries including Greece, Italy, Belgium and Germany. The company defended the practice in the name of religious neutrality.

In February 2018 the ombudsman for academic ethics and procedures, Vigilijus Sadauskas, was asked to resign after he proposed to reward a research thesis on Jewish crimes in the

20th century.¹⁵ He defended the proposal saying that he wanted to see how the public would react to the notion of collective responsibility of a group for the actions of a few individuals. Sadauskas claims that Lithuania as a whole is considered guilty for the crimes of individual Lithuanians, while the Jewish nation is exempt from such a ruling. He has so far refused to step down. The case came at a time of public debate about the notion of the collective guilt of nations for wartime atrocities. Lithuania outlawed such claims in 2010 but the discussion was revived after neighbouring Poland adopted a similar law.¹⁶

Prospects for freedom of religion

Compared to preceding years, societal tensions over religion have increased somewhat. This can be attributed to specific incidents, but also to heightened media interest in such cases.

The government is active in promoting religious tolerance and increased financial support for religious communities, while judicial authorities remain very responsive to any complaints related to abuse and discrimination. On 25th March 2018, there was a hearing in Parliament about persecuted Christians. Among the topics discussed was the nomination of an ambassador for International Freedom of Religion and direct cooperation with the churches in countries where persecution takes place.¹⁷

At a societal level, there was an outcry on several occasions about advertising perceived as blasphemous, statements seen as anti-Semitic and hostility towards predominantly Muslim refugees. Overall, the situation is stable.

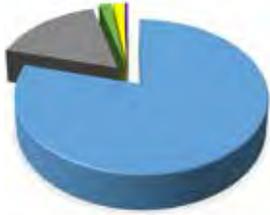
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LUXEMBOURG

RELIGION



- Christians: 79,3%
- Agnostics: 16,7%
- Muslims: 1,9%
- Atheists: 1,6%
- Others: 0,5%



AREA
2.586km²

POPULATION
576.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Luxembourg is a secular state which in its constitution guarantees freedom of religious expression, provided no crimes are committed in the process. Article 20 of the constitution enshrines opposition to coercion with regard to religious practice.¹

While there is no official state religion, a 2015 law formally approved conventions between religious communities and the state.² Official recognition is granted to six religious communities: Anglicans, Catholics, Jewish, Muslims, Orthodox, and Protestants.³

The 2015 law ends the practice of government-funded salaries and pensions for new religious workers; it commits the government to providing religious groups with financial support with amounts depending on the number of members. In addition, the law abolishes previous legislation that made regional government responsible for local religious communities which get into debt. The law also gives the government the right to cancel funding for religious communities which fail to respect human rights, national law and public order.⁴

To sign a convention with the state, a religious community must establish an official and stable representative body with which the government can interact. The body must be from a recognised world religion. Members of non-recognised communities can practise their faith freely but are not eligible for government funding.⁵

Religious instruction in school also changed under the 2015 law. Previously, religious curricula were established and managed locally by representatives of the Catholic Church together with municipal authorities. Students could opt either for instruction in Catholicism or an ethics course. Under the new law, religious education in public schools was abolished and replaced by an ethics course entitled 'Life and Society', which was implemented throughout primary and secondary schools in 2016 and 2017.⁶

Additionally, local church councils or vestries (*fabriques d'église*) were to be abolished.⁷

In August 2017, Luxembourg Justice Minister Felix Braz proposed a draft parliamentary bill banning the use of face coverings in certain public spaces, including schools, educational establishments, hospitals, nursing homes, public institutions and public transit. The draft

bill stipulates that managers of institutions have the option of temporarily suspending the ban. The proposed law sets out fines of between €25 and €250 for any violation of the ban.⁸ Across the country, 47 municipalities have introduced a ban on the use of the veil.⁹ The Assembly of the Muslim Community of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg opposes the draft legislation, stating that it violates freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and expression. The assembly also states that the bill contravenes a prohibition against discrimination.¹⁰

Incidents

In October 2017, a young woman wearing a hijab did not take the lawyer's oath, the Assembly of the Muslim Community of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg reported.¹²

In June 2016, a lawsuit was filed against the president of the Luxembourg Alliance of Humanists, Atheists and Agnostics, with a request for damages. The president faced a possible prison sentence in connection with a Facebook post which used the phrase "religious fanatics" to describe a group calling for confessional (religious) instruction in public schools.¹³ A court later dismissed the case.¹⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

As Luxembourg's religious demographics change, state-church relations are shifting toward the French model of secularism. Luxembourg's efforts to reach individual agreements with various religious groups and the inclusion of the Muslim community for the first time reveal an intention to maintain strong relations and open communications. An example of this is the creation of an inter-faith body called the Council of Recognised Religious Communities.

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MACEDONIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 63,8%
- Muslims: 32,7%
- Agnostics: 3,1%
- Others: 0,4%



AREA

25.713km²

POPULATION

2.081.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution defines Macedonia as a secular state, which guarantees freedom of religion to its citizens. Articles 9, 20, 48, 54 and 110 of the constitution¹ regulate individual rights of freedom of religion. Article 19 grants collective rights to religious communities, provides for the separation between religious bodies and the state and allows for the establishment of religious educational institutions, social and charitable organisations.

In Macedonia, religious identity is almost equivalent to ethnic identity, which is why it is important to note the following ethnic groupings which are freely acknowledged by the individuals themselves: Macedonians 64.2 percent, Albanians 25.2 percent, Turks 3.9 percent, Roma 2.7 percent, Serbs 1.8 percent, Bosnians 0.8 percent, Vlachs 0.5 percent, other 1.0 percent (2002 census²). The majority of Orthodox believers are ethnic Macedonian, and the majority of Muslim believers are ethnic Albanians and Turks.

The country's two major religions are Orthodox Christianity and Islam. Other groups include Roman Catholics, members of various Protestant denominations, and Jews.

Most Muslims live in the northern and western parts of the country, while the majority of Orthodox Christians live in the central and south-eastern regions.

The largest Roma concentration is in the Skopje and Eastern regions. The Roma have the most severe level of poverty among all ethnic groups.

The state requires religious communities to register through the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Groups. The commission categorises the religious organisations into Churches, religious communities and religious groups. The law does not make any distinction in the legal status between these categories. All three categories are treated the same way.³

The first category, Churches, comprises 15 Christian religious groups, the most prominent being the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church. The others are very small Christian churches, both traditional and newly founded. The second category, religious communities, includes: the Islamic Community, the Jewish Community, Jehovah's Witnesses, Sathya Sai Centre, Vaishnavska Religious Community

Iskon, Community Universal Life. The third category, religious groups, includes eight associations: six Christian and two Muslim. The Bektashi Community, an Islamic Sufi order, is also registered in this category.

The Serbian Orthodox Church is not mentioned in the register.

The law does not permit private religious primary schools but allows for private religious schools at the secondary level and above. The Ministry of Education requires fifth-grade students to take one of three elective courses: Introduction to Religions, Ethics in Religion, or Classical Culture in European Civilization.

There is no shortage of inter-faith discussions of importance to the religious communities.

The largest organised religious community in Macedonia is the Macedonian Orthodox Church - Ohrid Archbishopric (MPC-OA). By the end of the Second World War, a decision by the People's Liberation Front of Macedonia introduced the foundation of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in order to end the dispute between the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BPC) and to grant Macedonian Slavic people a source of their own national identity.⁴

Because of the MPC-OA's role in the country, it is note-worthy that in 1967 the Macedonian Church proclaimed its autocephaly. The Serbian Church bishops denounced the decision and condemned the clergy as schismatic. The autocephaly of the Macedonian Church is also not recognised by other canonical Orthodox churches. Three neighbouring Orthodox churches (the Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek churches) denied its autonomy, and even more its national prefix (Macedonian).

The Macedonian Orthodox Church celebrates its feasts according to the Julian calendar and services are held in Macedonian language. It has about 1,200 churches organised into 10 eparchies, whose bishops make up the Holy Synod of Bishops, headed by the Archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia. The Church numbers around 500 active priests in about 500 parishes. The Church claims jurisdiction over about 20 monasteries with more than 100 monks.

Islam was introduced into the area with the Ottoman conquest and the inflow of Turkish settlers in the 14th century. The great majority of Muslims in Macedonia follow Sunni Islam (in the Hanafi branch). There is a minority of adherents to the Bektashi order, which is a traditional dervish order. The Sunni group consists of Albanians, Turks, Roma, Muslim Macedonians and Bosnians. Since Albanians comprise the biggest Muslim group in Macedonia, they felt they should be the front-runners in the battle with the state for the equal status of Islam within the state.

The Islamic Community of Macedonia administers about 580 mosques across 13 muftiships. It is headed by the Reis-ul-ulema, Suleyman Rexhepi. The Reis-ululema is the Chief of the Islamic Scholars or the Grand Mufti of the Muslims in Macedonia. Prior to Macedonian independence, the Muslims of Macedonia fell under the jurisdiction of the Islamic Community of the Yugoslav Federation (Rijaset) with its headquarters in Sarajevo.⁵

The small yet active Catholic community of Macedonia bears the legacy of St Cyril and St Methodius and of Mother Teresa, who was born and raised in Skopje.

The Catholic Church first appeared in Macedonia in 350. The Macedonian Byzantine Catholic Church was established in 1918. Currently, there are about 20,000 members.⁶ These Catholics belong to the Latin (Roman) and to the Eastern (Byzantine) Rites. Around 5,000 Macedonians are Roman Catholics and around 15,000 are Uniats (Eastern Rite Catholics). The Catholics in Macedonia are not homogeneous in ethnic terms. The Uniats are almost exclusively Macedonians, while the majority of the Roman Catholics are Croats, Albanians, Poles, Slovenes and Hungarians.

Both rites are united in Macedonia under the jurisdiction of Monsignor Kiro Stoyanov who has a bi-ritual function in his capacity as Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Skopje, and as Apostolic Exarch with full jurisdiction over the Uniats in Macedonia.

Uniats acknowledge the Pope in Rome as their highest spiritual leader. The distinction between Uniats and Orthodox Christians is only in terms of administrative subordination to different centres and not in terms of religious rituals.

There are around 30 missionaries of the male and female congregations from the Latin and the Eastern rites in Macedonia. The male orders are represented by a Lazarist brother from the order of St. Vincent of Paul of the Latin Rite. There are around 10 Eucharistine sisters of the Eastern Rite. The rest of the sisters belong to the Latin Rites orders of St Vincent de Paul, the Holy Cross and the Missionaries of Charity of Calcutta. There are 11 Catholic churches in Macedonia and 20 priests of both rites.

The Catholic Church in Macedonia enjoys good relations with the representatives of the two other main religions in the country. According to Monsignor Stojanov, the Catholic Church tries to help the Orthodox Christians and the Muslims in Macedonia reconcile their positions.

On 17th April 2017, the Primary Court Skopje officially recognised the Church of Scientology of Macedonia as a religious organisation. It ruled that all legal prerequisites were met according to the law on the legal status of churches, religious communities and religious groups of the Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia.

On 9th November 2017, the Holy Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church—Ohrid Archbishopric sent a letter to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church with three requests or proposals:

- 1) Recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church by other Eastern Orthodox Churches;
- 2) Recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church's autocephalous status; and
- 3) Readiness to recognise the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as the Macedonian Orthodox Church's mother Church.⁷

The Serbian Orthodox Church expressed its strong disagreement with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church's decision to present the case for the canonicity and autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church to the other canonical local orthodox churches.⁸

There is no progress regarding the 10-year dispute between the Catholic Church and the Macedonian state over the return of property in the village of Paljurci. The property was nationalised by former communist authorities. The local Catholic community wanted to use this property for the construction of a church and a monastery.⁹

Incidents

There are no incidents to report in violation of freedom of religion. On 26th March 2016, the Skopje Court sentenced Rexhep Memishi, self-proclaimed imam in Tutunsus mosque in Skopje to seven years in prison for taking part in a paramilitary organisation and recruiting fighters who joined the war in Syria.¹⁰

Prospects for freedom of religion

After Macedonia survived two very unstable political years, the Social Democrat-led government is now doing everything to transform Macedonia into the front-runner in the race for EU and NATO membership. The unresolved dispute with Greece over the Macedonian state's name got a significant positive boost at the beginning of 2018.

The fact that Macedonia received good reports for its reforms from Brussels, and is included again in the EU strategy of enlargement for the western Balkans, has raised the hope of the ordinary citizens for a better and more prosperous future. However, a long road to stability lies ahead. The fight against the infiltration of Islamist extremism and its dread of individual human rights is far from over;¹¹ Macedonia will need the support of the religious communities, the EU and NATO to emerge as the victor.

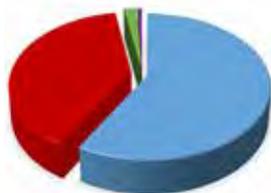
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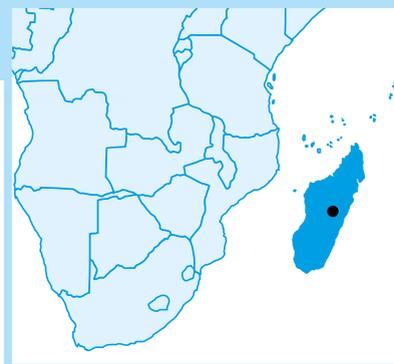
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MADAGASCAR

RELIGION



- Christians: 58,2%
- Ethnoreligionists: 39,1%
- Muslims: 2,1%
- Others: 0,6%



AREA	POPULATION
587.295km ²	24.916.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 1 of the 2010 constitution¹ states that Madagascar is a secular state. Under Article 2, the concept of state neutrality towards all religions is presented as the basis of the separation between state and religion. No government official can be part of the management of a religious body. Freedom of religion is guaranteed by Articles 6 and 10.

The state requires religious groups to formally register with the Ministry of Interior. Tax exemption for religious groups can be requested in case of foreign donations.² According to Madagascan law, in order to be legally registered as religious entity, groups must have at least a hundred members and an elected council with a maximum of nine members, all of them Madagascan citizens. There are about 283 officially registered religious groups.

As indicated in Aid to the Church in Need's 2016 Religious Freedom Report, the nationality code prevents children born from Malagasy mothers and foreign fathers from obtaining citizenship. The issue of stateless children from mixed marriages continues to affect Muslim families. Around six percent of the country's Muslims are technically stateless because of this.³

On several occasions government representatives – especially President Hery Rajaonarimampiapina⁴ and Prime Minister Mahafaly Olivier Solofonandrasana⁵ – have been accused of failing to uphold the secular nature of the state by using religious events for political purposes.

Incidents

In 2016, there was a clear increase in the number of attacks against Christian churches and parishes as well as religious personnel. Local sources stress that such incidents are particularly shocking since Madagascans traditionally respect all religious leaders. At one point, the Prime Minister spoke of "a plot against the Church and the State".⁶

Religious property has been attacked. For example, in the last two years there was a surprising surge in theft of church bells. The motive seems to be the great economic value of the bells' metal;⁷ however, a Church source⁸ said that in some cases it has been part of

a surreptitious attempt to curb Church activities, adding that certain groups have paid local criminals to deliver the stolen Church bells to them. This situation appears to have improved since mid-2017 and no more incidents have been reported as of time of writing.

There have been several reports about Turkey's involvement in the largescale arrival of foreign Muslims.⁹ Some reports indicate an increase in the number of supporters of Wahhabi Islam in the country.¹⁰ Incentives have been offered to those who convert, including financial assistance and education (including both Qur'anic classes and university studies).¹¹ Pakistan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are suspected of playing a significant role in the spread of Islam.¹²

On 20th September 2016, 10 Pakistani imams were expelled for visa violations.¹³ The imams were investigated following large-scale Eid celebrations that included the sacrifice of 200 zebus, which led the government to suspect that foreign funds had been used.

On 12th November 2016, Brother Prestome, a 43-year-old member of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart in Ankaboka, Sakaraha district, was kidnapped. The attack was carried out by three armed men and occurred while the whole religious community was gathered. The attackers apparently targeted Brother Prestome because of his albinism.¹⁴ A couple of days later, he was released.

On 1st April 2017, five Sisters were raped when bandits attacked Notre Dame de la Salette convent in Antsirabe. The attackers also stole money and valuables.¹⁵

On 22nd April 2017, armed bandits attacked Ambendrana Antsohihy Parish, killing Father Lucien Njiva, a Capuchin priest and injuring a deacon who was with him. Apparently, their intention was to steal the bell from the church.¹⁶ Subsequently two ex-gendarmes were arrested in connection with the incident.¹⁷

On 25th April 2017, the Minister of Education closed down 16 Qur'anic schools across the country. The establishments offered religious classes for five hours a week, exceeding the governmental limit of one hour.¹⁸ The country's Muslim communities reacted very angrily to the move, labelling it "a declaration of war"¹⁹ and accusing the Minister of Education of being "Islamophobic".²⁰

Prospects for freedom of religion

Madagascar appears to be a battleground for certain religious groups looking to win converts. In one unusual case, a group of 121 people converted to Judaism in a mass ceremony.²¹ The issue of radicalism and its potential risks, as well as the increased presence of foreign Muslims – mainly in the south-east of the country – will be one of the issues needing to be closely monitored in the years to come.

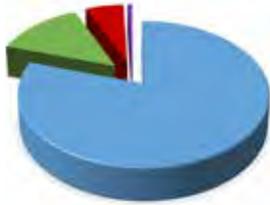
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MALAWI

RELIGION



- Christians: 80%
- Muslims: 13,5%
- Ethnoreligionists: 5,8%
- Others: 0,7%



AREA	POPULATION
118.484km ²	17.750.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Republic of Malawi lies on the border between southern Africa, which is predominantly Christian, and East Africa, a region where Islam has played a significant role for centuries. Freedom of religion is enshrined in the Malawian constitution.¹ Malawi's laws require religious communities to register with the authorities.² However, the religious beliefs and activities of these communities are not subject to state monitoring.

Religious instruction in primary schools is compulsory.³ Depending on the faith or confessional affiliation of the pupils, this includes Bible studies or moral and religious education. According to the constitution, the curriculum should help overcome religious intolerance.⁴ Malawi has many different religious educational institutions. They include not only schools sponsored by different denominations but also by radio and television stations. In Malawi, 12 radio stations and four television stations are run by religious communities. According to operating requirements, broadcasts must "not [be] offensive to the religious convictions of any section of the population."⁵

Prisoners have the right to receive the religious pastoral support of their choice.⁶

Incidents

There were no constitutional amendments or serious incidents involving freedom of religion in Malawi during the period under review.

The Malawi Human Rights Commission investigated one case of alleged religious discrimination involving a pupil from a Rastafari family who broke school rules by having a Rasta hairstyle. The case is still pending.⁷ How far Rastafari customs should be accommodated, especially in schools, has concerned the Malawi Human Rights Commission for some time.⁸

Religious education has frequently been discussed in Malawi, often in response to complaints by Islamic communities who feel disadvantaged by the school system.⁹

Apart from this, there are mostly respectful relations between religions and other communities of believers in Malawi. For example, several faith communities participate

in the Malawi Electoral Support Network.¹⁰ This group, which addresses questions of human rights and political education, includes representatives from the Interfaith Public Affairs Committee, the Muslim Association of Malawi, the Quadria Muslim Association of Malawi, the Islamic Information Bureau, and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. Members of different communities of believers work together in other areas of economic and civilian life as well.¹¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

There are no indications to suggest that freedom of religion in Malawi is under major threat. That said, social tensions could have a negative effect on inter-faith relations.

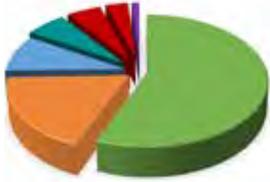
According to the UNHCR, thousands of refugees have come to Malawi from Mozambique in recent years,¹² fleeing fighting between the Mozambican government and rebels. The refugee situation deteriorated dramatically in early 2016. Although the situation improved last year, the task of providing long-term care for the refugees is problematic. As long as the Mozambique government fails to guarantee the safety of the returnees, they are likely to remain in Malawi.¹³ The provision of care for refugees also presents a challenge for Malawi's Churches and religious communities in social as well as pastoral terms. Experience shows that religious tensions often worsen when different faith groups live in close proximity in extreme poverty.

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MALAYSIA

RELIGION



- Muslims: 56,2%
- Buddhists: 18,4%
- Christians: 9,1%
- Hindus: 6,3%
- Chinese Folk Religionists: 5,3%
- Ethnoreligionists: 3,5%
- Others: 1,2%



AREA	POPULATION
330.323km ²	30.752.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Under article 3(1) of the constitution “Islam is the religion of the Federation [of Malaysia] but other religions can be practised in peace and harmony throughout the Federation.”¹ Article 11 stipulates that “everyone has the right to profess and practise his religion”, but, at the same time, paragraph 4 of the same article declares that the laws of the states and the federal government “may control or limit the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among people professing the religion of Islam”²

Article 160 of the constitution defines a “Malay” as, among other criteria, “a person who professes the religion of Islam”.³ Malays – who represent about 55 percent of the population – are defined as distinct from ethnic minorities, who are mainly of Chinese and Indian origin. Members of these ethnic minorities – be they of Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or other religions – are in principle free to convert to Islam. By contrast conversion is forbidden to Malays (in the ethnic sense of the term) because, as they are supposedly Muslims, they cannot leave their religion as apostasy is a crime under the law.

In December 2014, a group of 25 Malay Muslims, including former Senior Civil Servants, signed an open letter stating that the country was “slowly sliding towards religious extremism and violence”. They expressed their deep concern at the rise of Islamic radicalism, a situation which, through political calculation, has been tolerated and even encouraged by the Government.⁴ Since 2014 the situation has not improved.

Incidents

Muslims fall under the jurisdiction of Islamic courts (Shari’a Courts) for all matters of personal law (i.e. marriage, divorce and inheritance rules). A constitutional provision stipulates that civil courts do not exercise jurisdiction over areas that fall within the jurisdiction of Shari’a Courts. This causes serious problems when judgments rendered by Islamic courts involve non-Muslims (in the case, for instance, of divorce between a Muslim and a non-Muslim). This can lead to non-Muslims being sanctioned by an Islamic judge without any possibility of appeal against the judgment rendered.

In the period under review there has been a significant development in this area of the law. The background is as follows. Two Hindu Malaysians – Pathmanathan and Indira Gandhi – were legally married in 1993. In April 2009, the husband, K. Pathmanathan, converted to Islam under the name Muhammad Riduan Abdullah, kidnapped his three children (then aged 11 months, 11 and 12 years old) from the marital home, and converted them too to Islam. In March 2010, a civil court granted custody of the children to their mother, but the father refused to obey, claiming that an Islamic court had already given him custody of the children. In July 2013, his now ex-wife, Indira Gandhi, obtained a judgment from the High Court of Ipoh. The judges declared as unconstitutional the act of forcing a minor to convert to another religion without the consent of both parents.

However, on 30th December 2015, the Putrajaya Court of Appeal took a different view. It ruled that the eldest child, who is now an adult, could autonomously decide her religious affiliation. However, it also ruled that in the cases of the two children who are still minors “the determination of the validity of [their] conversion to the Muslim faith was strictly a religious matter and, therefore, was exclusively within the jurisdiction of the Islamic Court.”

Unexpectedly, the judgement of December 2015 was overruled by a decision of the High Court of Justice on 29th January 2018. The judges ruled that unilateral conversions, that is to say the change of religious affiliation of a minor child by only one of the parents, were illegal.⁵ In doing so, for the first time, the judges broke the jurisprudence putting the Islamic courts at the same level, or even higher, than the civil courts.

Another case highlighted an additional contentious point pertaining to relations between religious communities. While a non-Muslim can convert to Islam, a Muslim cannot leave his religion. This prohibition has provoked a certain number of legal controversies, and, here again, the issue was the pre-eminence or not of civil law over religious law.

On 24th March 2016, the Sarawak State High Court allowed Roneye Rebit, 41, to renounce Islam, the faith he had adopted aged 10. This took place without him having to go through an Islamic court.

Judge Yew Jen Kie who ruled in this case relied on Article 11 of the constitution to render her verdict. She considered that Rebit had followed the wishes of his parents at the time of his conversion and, therefore, could not be considered as a person professing Islam, especially since in 1999 he had been baptised in the Christian faith and had thus freely chosen his religion. As a result, his case did not fall within the jurisdiction of a Shari’a court because he could not be considered a Muslim.

The judge requested that a letter of renunciation of the Muslim faith be handed to her by the Islamic Affairs Office of the State of Sarawak and that his name and religious affiliation be changed at the Civil Status Office of Malaysia.

For those who support religious freedom in Malaysia, this judgment is a great victory. However, related clarifications of the law have been less forthcoming. For instance, Sarawak State Minister-President Abang Johari Openg said on 3rd March 2018 that his government needed an additional six months to study the blind spots in religious legislation before considering an

amendment of state law on the subject.⁶ Sarawak has the peculiarity of being the only state within the Federation of Malaysia to have a majority of Christians (44.2 percent Christians and 30.2 percent Muslims, according to the latest, 2010 census).

There have been sporadic acts of violence against individuals of various religions.

On 13th February 2017, a Protestant pastor was abducted in broad daylight in the City of Petaling Jaya. No ransom demand was communicated to the family and there has been no sign of the pastor since.⁷ Commentators have drawn attention to the fact that he was accused in 2011 of proselytizing by the Islamic Affairs Office of the State of Selangor (JAIS), but his relatives say that he was only engaged in charitable actions led by his Church Harapan Komuniti ('Hope Community').

In November 2016, Joshua Hilmi and his wife, Ruth Sitepu, disappeared. Mr Hilmi converted from Islam to Christianity and became a Protestant pastor. In the same month, the Shia Muslim Amri Che Mat, was also abducted.⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

The ruling party is in crisis, there are serious corruption charges against the Prime Minister, and the Malaysian economy is showing signs of weakness. For those reasons, the times are uncertain. The recent judgements which have a bearing on religious liberty will only really bear fruit if they are reflected in wider legislative changes.

Endnotes

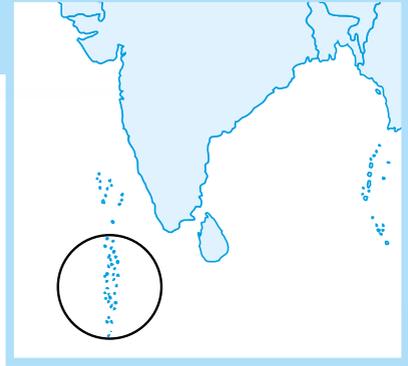
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MALDIVES

RELIGION



- Muslims: 98,5%
- Others: 1,5%



AREA
300km²

POPULATION
370.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

We mostly know the Maldives for the heavenly beaches and the global warming risks threatening this archipelago comprising nearly 1,200 islands, of which only 188 are inhabited. In fact, this country accommodates nearly 1.5 million tourists per year, most of whom arrive at the international airport located on an island away from Malé, the island-capital. Living there are nearly 150,000 people, all squeezed inside a land mass of just 6km². This makes the capital one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Tourists leave for the atoll-islands that host dozens of luxury hotels. This means many have limited or no contact with the reality of life in this republic where Islam is the state religion and where the vast majority of the population is Sunni Muslim.

According to the 2008 constitution, the Maldives are not an Islamic republic. However, article 2 defines the Maldives as “a sovereign, independent and democratic republic based on the principles of Islam”.

Article 10, paragraph (a) of the constitution stipulates that “the religion of the state of the Maldives is Islam.”¹ Adding that Islam is central to the country’s legal structure, article 10 further promulgates: “No law contrary to any tenet of Islam shall be enacted in the Maldives.”

Under article 9, paragraph (d): “...despite the provisions of article (a), a non-Muslim may not become a citizen of the Maldives.” This is why the Maldives claims to have a 100 percent Muslim population. Nevertheless, these official statistics ignore the presence within the archipelago of a large immigrant population, estimated at between 50,000 and 100,000 people, mainly from South Asia (Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan), who do not practise the Muslim faith.

Article 19, dealing with restrictions on freedom, provides: “A citizen is free to engage in any conduct or activity that is not expressly prohibited by Islamic Shari’a or by law.” It states that “No control or restraint may be exercised against any person unless it is expressly authorised by law.”

Article 27 legislates for the right to freedom of thought and the freedom to communicate one's opinions and to express oneself, but "in a manner that is not contrary to any tenet of Islam".

Paragraphs (f) and (g) of article 67 prescribe that it is the responsibility of citizens "to promote democratic values and practices in a manner that is not inconsistent with any tenet of Islam" and "to preserve and protect the state religion of Islam, culture, language and heritage of the country".

Pursuant to article 100, the President and Vice-President of the nation may be removed from office by a resolution of Parliament in case of "direct violation of a tenet of Islam". Moreover, taking an oath for a public function requires swearing "in the name of Almighty Allah" and saying: "I will respect the religion of Islam."

Even education is designed to promote Islam. Article 36, paragraph (c) of the constitution states that: "Education shall strive to inculcate obedience to Islam, instil love for Islam, foster respect for human rights, and promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all people."

In accordance with article 70, paragraph (c), Parliament "shall not pass any law that contravenes any tenet of Islam".

Article 142 requires that judges take account of Shari'a in order to settle issues not covered in the constitution or the judicial system.

The constitution defines the "tenet of Islam" as follows: "The Holy Qur'an and those principles of Shari'a whose provenance is not in dispute from among those found in the Sunna of the Noble Prophet, and those principles derived from these two foundations." The term "Islamic Shari'a is defined as: "the Holy Qur'an and the ways preferred by the learned people within the community and followers of the Sunna in relation to criminal, civil, personal and other matters found in the Sunna."

In addition to the restrictions within the constitution, the Protection of Religious Unity Act 1994 aims to unify the practice and preaching of Islam, as well as to limit the practice and expression of religions other than Sunni Islam.

In compliance with article 2 of the Protection of Religious Unity Act 1994, published in the Government's Official Gazette in September 2011, government authorisation is required for the preaching of Islamic sermons and conferences and the dissemination of information about Islamic principles. In accordance with article 4, these sermons, conferences or doctrines must not contradict Islam, nor the general consensus established between Muslim scholars, or the Qur'an, Sunna or Hadiths. Article 4 also prohibits preaching by other religions.

Article 6 of the Protection of Religious Unity Act 1994 stipulates: "In the Maldives, it is forbidden to propagate a faith other than Islam or to make any effort to convert anyone to a religion other than Islam. It is also illegal to display in public symbols or slogans belonging to a religion other than Islam, or to generate interest in them."

According to article 7 of the same law, it is also illegal in the Maldives to “carry or exhibit in public books about other religions (apart from Islam), books and texts that promote and propagate other religions, as well as the translation into Dhivehi, [the official Maldivian language] of those books and texts related to other religions.”

Under article 9, “it is unlawful for non-Muslims living in the Maldives and for non-Muslims visiting the Maldives to express their religious slogans in public, and to organise religious activities by creating faith groups and carrying out such activities in public places, and engaging Maldivians in analogous group activities.”

In addition, article 10 legislates: “It is unlawful to possess, distribute or propagate programs, writings, works of art and advertising about religions other than Islam.”

The penalty for any violation of these legal provisions, pursuant to article 12, is between two and five years of imprisonment for Maldivians, and foreigners who transgress or infringe them “must be handed over to the Ministry of Immigration and Emigration for expulsion from the Maldives”.

In August 2016, the legislative arsenal was reinforced by a new law concerning defamation. This legal text criminalises any speech, remark, writing or action that is considered defamatory towards “all proponents of Islam”. Potential offenders are punishable by fines ranging from 50,000 Maldivian rufiyaas (US\$3,200) to two million rufiyaas (US\$130,000), and sentences of three to six months of imprisonment. Publications, including those online, found guilty of harbouring “defamatory” comments may have their licenses revoked.²

After 30 years of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom’s presidency, the Republic of Maldives in 2008 seemed to have taken the path of multi-party democracy; a new President, Mohamed Nasheed, was even democratically elected, which is considered as an historic event for the country. The rise to power of President Nasheed, former journalist, ecologist and tireless activist, was followed by a new focus on freedom. The country’s 2008 constitution asserted in particular the independence of the judiciary. Nevertheless, in 2012, after three rather disappointing years as far as reforms are concerned, Nasheed had the Chief Justice of the Criminal Court arrested on suspicion of corruption. This arrest was followed by two days of unrest which led to the resignation of the President. Following a controversial presidential election, the Gayoom clan returned to power with Abdulla Yameen Gayoom, half-brother of the former dictator, sworn in as President on 17th November 2013.

Since then, President Abdulla Yameen Gayoom has exercised power in an ever more authoritarian manner. Following an assassination attempt in September 2015 while returning from a pilgrimage to Mecca, and allegations of involvement in a major corruption scandal, the President has made a number of arbitrary arrests of people at the highest level of government; two Vice-Presidents were charged with treason while two Defence Ministers were put behind bars.³ In addition, Mohamed Nasheed was openly arrested in the street on 22nd February 2015 and sentenced to 13 years in jail for “terrorism”. His sentencing followed a trial that was marred by irregularities.⁴ In January 2016, having obtained an exit permit to go for medical treatment in London, Mohamed Nasheed was granted political asylum in Great Britain, where he continues his fight for justice.

The upcoming presidential elections of 2018 have made the atmosphere tense again. On 5th February 2018, the government lifted the state of emergency. It had been decreed 45 days earlier by President Abdulla Yameen in an effort to neutralise his last rivals. The President resorted to a state of emergency to overturn a Supreme Court ruling ordering the release of 12 deputies of his party, arrested after having switched to the opposition in 2017. If it had been applied, the judgement of the Supreme Court would have seen the President lose his majority in Parliament. The state of emergency has thus allowed the Head of the Executive to consolidate his power a few months before the presidential elections scheduled for September 2018.

These power struggles are coupled with family feuds, behind which hide important economic interests. Meanwhile, radical Islam continues to thrive within the Maldives.

Incidents

As promulgated by the constitution and the prevailing legal system, there is no freedom to convert from Islam to any other religion or to express disbelief in Islam. No religion other than Sunni Islam can be taught within the country. The Maldives claim that foreigners residing in the country can practise their religion privately, but in the past many Christian expatriates have been either arrested or deported for attending private worship.⁵ All visitors to the Maldives are required to sign an immigration form stating that they do not carry pornographic material, idols, alcohol, pork butchery, or “material against Islam”⁶ Alcohol is available in hotels accommodating foreigners on the atolls, but it is against the law to offer alcohol to a Maldivian.

According to Amnesty International, religious militias acting apparently in collusion with the police have in recent years committed an increasing number of kidnappings and attacks targeting social gatherings, particularly those accused of promoting “atheism”. In 2015, these religious militias assaulted peaceful protesters with the complicity of the police, and no one was brought to justice for these assaults. For Amnesty International, these attacks are part of a deterioration described as “alarming” for human rights conditions within the country.⁷

As for a possible Christian presence within the Maldives, the only thing that can be guaranteed is that there is no church or place of Christian worship in the country. The few Maldivian Christians have nowhere to meet and do their best to prevent their faith from being discovered. Officially there are no Maldivian Christians, only Christian expatriates. The official import of Bibles and Christian literature is categorically forbidden.

In recent times, there has been an increase of graffiti calling on people to join the ranks of Daesh (ISIS) appearing on the walls in different atolls. The influence of Daesh is manifested not only by graffiti but also by significant recruitment to the terror group. According to security-issues journalist Praveen Swami in *The Indian Express*, a daily newspaper in India, the Indian and Western Intelligence Services estimate that, out of a total population of 370,000 inhabitants, 200 Maldivian nationals have gone to Iraq and Syria, the largest

contingent, in proportion to the national population, of any country in the world.⁸ These departures for Daesh were confirmed by a study of the Soufan Group in April 2016.⁹ There are several reasons behind this figure, in particular the close links between Maldivian jihadist networks and extremist groups in Pakistan. Also of note here is the authorities' incapacity to investigate these terrorist groups and their recruitment drives, utilising social networks. The Indian Express concluded: "For the Maldives, whose economy depends on tourism, the possibility of attacks on Western tourists holidaying in isolated hotels on one of the countless islands within the archipelago, is an increasing concern".

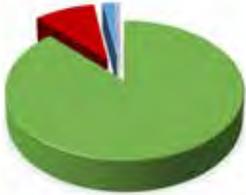
Prospects for freedom of religion

President Yameen's authoritarian rule and practices have met with increasing opposition both inside and outside the Maldives. India and China are involved in intense competition to exert their influence on this archipelago, which is strategically located on one of the main maritime communication routes. The outcome of the presidential elections scheduled for September 2018 and the evolution of power exercised by President Yameen will have a determining impact on the prospects for religious freedom. For the time being the outlook is very uncertain in a country which extremist and authoritarian Islamism is predominant.

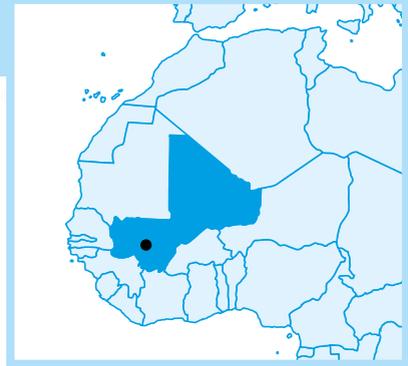
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RELIGION



- Muslims: 87,9%
- Ethnoreligionists: 9,7%
- Christians: 2,2%
- Others: 0,2%



AREA	POPULATION
1.240.192km ²	18.135.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution of Mali, considered one of the most liberal in the Muslim world,¹ declares Mali to be a secular state that guarantees all citizens the same rights, regardless of their religious affiliation.² The secular nature of the state is enshrined in Article 2 of the 1992 constitution: "All Malians are born and live free and equal in their rights and duties. Any discrimination based on social origin, colour, language, race, sex, religion, or political opinion is prohibited." Article 4 states: "Every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, worship, opinion, expression, and creation in respect to the law."³ Mali's constitution clearly and unequivocally guarantees the right to freedom of worship and the right to profess one's faith through individual or communal acts of worship.

In June 2017, Mali's National Assembly adopted a draft constitutional amendment to strengthen the presidency, among other things. This proved controversial, and in the face of political opposition party and groups in civil society, in August 2017 President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta announced that the government was dropping the proposed constitutional amendment.⁴

Mali's Penal Code also follows a fundamentally liberal approach. It holds that every form of discrimination on the basis of religion is as punishable as the violation of freedom of religion.⁵

The security situation in Mali remained very unstable during the reporting period. Various Islamist terrorist groups such as the Islamic State or Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) wielded their influence in Mali as well.⁶ The poor security situation also causes problems not least for religious minorities who, due to their small numbers, are in some respects among the most vulnerable groups in Malian society.⁷

The country's vast landmass in the Sahel extends from the Sahara in the north to the wet savannah in the south. Following a military coup in March 2012, the country was plunged into chaos from which it has not yet recovered. When jihadists and rebel groups threatened to overrun the entire country, France – the former colonial power until 1960 – intervened militarily⁸, and in early 2013, with the backing of African forces, French troops recaptured the north of the country. The French subsequently handed responsibility over

to MINUSMA,⁹ the UN stabilisation mission, though they continue to maintain a powerful anti-terror unit in Mali. France is at the head of the 4,000-strong Barkhane mission¹⁰ under which Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad cooperate with the French military. Their shared objective is to combat the cross-border terrorist threat in the Sahel region. In addition, in February 2017, the countries of the 'G5 Sahel' – Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger and Chad – agreed to create a joint West African anti-terror force, with financial support provided by Saudi Arabia, among others.¹¹

The large international military engagement in Mali and its neighbours demonstrates how great the danger of jihadism was during the reporting period – and is likely to remain in future. Mali is predominantly Muslim Sunni. Almost 13 percent of the population belong to other religions. Christians constitute just over 2 percent, two thirds are Catholic and one third is Protestant. Mali is also home to adherents of traditional African religions (almost 9 percent); some Muslims and Christians also incorporate African traditions into their ritual observances.¹² While the southern part of the country is considered relatively safe, the situation in the north remains tense. There are threats of terrorist attack in connection with smuggling activities.

Incidents

According to the German-based human rights organisation, the Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker (GfbV), the Society for Threatened Peoples,¹³ the Malian military has been overwhelmed by the need to protect the civilian population. At least 78 people lost their lives in terrorist attacks in northern and central Mali from early January to mid-February 2018 alone.¹⁴ According to GfbV, 31 people were killed on 27th January 2018 when Islamist militants attacked a military camp near the city of Timbuktu. Two days earlier, on 25th January 2018, 26 civilians were killed when their bus hit a landmine. To make matters worse, according to GfbV, the Tuareg conflict in the north of the country is – at the time of writing – still not over, despite a peace deal signed in 2015.

Mali's army is also losing troops every week. According to GfbV, in 2017 716 soldiers were killed and 548 security forces wounded in the country's embattled northern and central regions. For UN peacekeepers as well, no theatre of operations in the world is more dangerous than Mali: 21 armed members of the UN peacekeeping mission and seven civilian employees of the UN died in 2017.¹⁵

Muslim and Christian officials have repeatedly condemned the violence¹⁶ to which are exposed not only Christians, but in many cases moderate Muslims as well. They remind observers of the long tradition of peaceful coexistence of Mali's religious and faiths groups.¹⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

As in many other countries in West Africa, the situation of religious freedom in Mali is closely linked to the local security situation. If jihadism and the criminal activity associated with it – afflicting members of all of the country's religions and denominations – can

be stopped, the situation for the Christian minority will in all likelihood improve. This assessment is also supported by the fact that the peaceful coexistence of religions in Mali has a long tradition and is still observed in many parts of the country in spite of all the violence. Reconciliation thus remains possible.

Mali's small Christian minority has welcomed the international military commitment to stabilise the country. Monsignor Edmond Dembele, General Secretary of the Episcopal Conference of Mali, commented on this in the media in late 2017.¹⁸ The creation of West African forces to fight jihadism is a sign of hope, not only for Mali but for the entire sub-Saharan region. Monsignor Dembele expressed his support for the resolution creating the 'G5 Sahel' peacekeeping force for West Africa to stabilise the region (see above). For months, according to Monsignor Dembele, the security situation in a number of areas of Mali has been alarming.

The G5 troops' headquarters are in Bamako, Mali, but – at the time of writing – they are also due to be deployed in Niger and Burkina Faso. Monsignor Dembele stated: "We had hoped that, with the signing of the peace agreement of Algiers in June 2015, the conditions for the pacification and stabilisation of the country would have been created."¹⁹ He added: "In fact, for a few months after the signing of the agreement, we experienced a moment of relative peace. But for about a year we have witnessed a return to insecurity, especially in the centre of Mali and even in the capital Bamako, where there have been attacks."²⁰

In fact, alongside jihadism, there is another central factor that plays a role in shaping the country's fate, namely smuggling.²¹ Indeed, solving the conflict in the north is made much more difficult by a flourishing smuggling trade.²² In addition to migrants and merchandise, weapons and drugs are trafficked as well, and new international routes for drug smuggling continue to be uncovered. In 2009, the discovery in the desert of northern Mali of an aircraft used to transport cocaine from Latin America attracted a great deal of international attention.

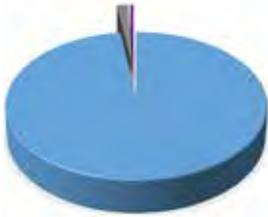
Whether the presence of foreign troops in Mali will stop or even reverse the spread of criminal activities and jihadism in the region remains an open question. "Mali is our Afghanistan," the French newspaper *Le Monde* claimed in November 2017.²³ The patterns were similar in both countries: first, military success (northern Mali was retaken by French troops in 2013), then a failed reconstruction effort, followed by the gradual spread of a new uprising led by forces more brutal and politically astute than the last. The reasons are complex: the commitment of the Western forces can be expected to decline in the long term – due in large measure to loss of confidence in local partners. Local authorities, on the other hand, are marginalised by their Western protectors. The outsiders tell them what to do even though they do not understand local conditions – such as how to deal with clans, tribes, political factions or militia.²⁴ Meanwhile, jihadism continues to grow.

Endnotes

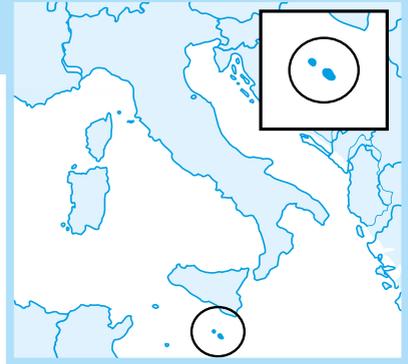
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RELIGION



- Christians: 97,8%
- Agnostics: 1,7%
- Others: 0,5%



AREA
315km²

POPULATION
420.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 2(1) of the constitution of Malta states: "The religion of Malta is the Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion."¹ This does not indicate that Catholicism is the state religion. The constitution, in article 40(1), also upholds the principle of religious freedom: "All persons in Malta shall have full freedom of conscience and enjoy the free exercise of their respective mode of religious worship."² Anyone in Malta is therefore free to practise whatever religion he/she desires. The Roman Catholic religion is enshrined in the constitution in consequence of the fact that the vast majority of people in Malta follow the Catholic faith.

Furthermore, the constitution also affirms that the state is obliged to provide education on the Catholic faith in state schools. This is reiterated in the Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Malta, signed on 16th November 1989, and the Modes of Regulation on Catholic Religious Instruction and Education in State Schools.³ Another agreement between the Holy See and the Malta, signed on 28th November 1991, guarantees the existence of Church schools there.⁴

Other Christian Churches have long been present in Malta and most of them have their own places of worship where the faithful can freely take part in services. Indeed, following the norms of the Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (1993) the majority Roman Catholic Church seeks to support other Churches and Christian traditions, including helping to access suitable places of worship. This is clearly stated in the 1993 document: "Catholic churches are consecrated or blessed buildings which have an important theological and liturgical significance for the Catholic community. They are therefore generally reserved for Catholic worship. However, if priests, ministers or communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church do not have a place or the liturgical objects necessary for celebrating worthily their religious ceremonies, the diocesan bishop may allow them the use of a church or a Catholic building and also lend them what may be necessary for their services. Under similar circumstances, permission may be given to them for interment or for the celebration of services at Catholic cemeteries."⁵

The following are examples where the concept of religious freedom is upheld with regard to the provision of places of worship:

The Romanian Orthodox parish of the Nativity of St John the Baptist, led by parish priest Father Ionut Iftimia, was granted the use of Saint Roque's Catholic Church in Valletta. The Romanian Orthodox community meets every Sunday for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy in what was formerly an unused church where catechism used to be taught to children. The building was in urgent need of repair. A Roman Catholic benefactor responded generously when he witnessed the plight of the Romanian community. In addition, an ecumenical service included a collection for the Romanian church.⁶

The Catholic Church of Saint Nicholas in Valletta is shared. As well as being a place of Catholic worship, Orthodox faithful from Serbia, Russia and Bulgaria use the building for the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom. In this regard the Orthodox from these Churches enjoy the cooperation and timely assistance of the priests of the Greek Rite Catholic parish in Valletta. This is another example of fraternal cooperation among Churches in Malta.⁷ On 20th August 2017 The Times of Malta reported that Russian faithful wanted to build their own church in Kappara, Local residents and environmental groups had raised concerns.⁸

Various Coptic Orthodox groups have been using Catholic churches or chapels in Zebbug and in Valletta. The Egyptian Copts have used a countryside chapel in the Zebbug area for a number of years. They have recently requested that they be offered a place of worship which is not as remote as their existing chapel. Many worshippers have had to travel on foot including in the summer heat and in the depths of winter.

On 28th December 2014 The Sunday Times of Malta reported on the situation for Coptic groups, including Ethiopian and Eritrean communities. The article by Peter Newsham demonstrates the positive working relationship between the Catholic Church in Malta and these communities.⁹ These Christian communities celebrated one of their greatest festivities at an outdoor venue to which other Christians were invited to participate.¹⁰

In May 2017, the Ethiopian Coptic Orthodox community took part in the State of Europe Forum, held in Malta, and organised by Sallux and the Robert Schuman Centre, the Netherlands. Their involvement was appreciated by other Christian groups in Malta and beyond.

Incidents

Despite the afore-mentioned positive situation, Archbishop Charles Jude Scicluna of Malta has been criticised on a number of occasions in the past year, especially on social media, for his views, especially concerning social, ethical and environmental issues. Sometimes, when the archbishop took part in talk-shows, he was shouted down. Certain prominent bloggers mounted a campaign against him. These incidents demonstrate a degree of intolerance towards the Archbishop in response to his articulation of the Church's thinking on issues of human dignity and other sensitive areas of a socio-economic and ecological nature.¹¹

In July 2016, a 1933 law punishing the vilification of the Roman Catholic religion was overturned when the Maltese Parliament approved amendments to the Criminal Law. Proponents of these changes affirmed that "the law would not allow people to incite religious hatred – noting that the incitement of hatred based on religion, gender, race,

sexuality, gender identity or political belief was already illegal as per a more recent law and would remain so ... In a democratic country, people should be free to make fun of religions, while not inciting hatred.”¹²

Opponents to this amendment stated that “freedom of expression should not mean that people are free to insult the things that I hold dear – that is diabolical logic.”¹³ Reacting to the new legislation, “Archbishop Charles Scicluna tweeted his dismay at news that MPs had, as expected, successfully passed Bill 133. ‘Demeaning God and man indeed go hand in hand. A sad day for Malta. Lord, forgive them: they do not know what they do’.”¹⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

Religious freedom is upheld in Malta to a large degree. Members of all religions have the right to practise their faith. The Catholic Church provides support to other Churches and traditions.

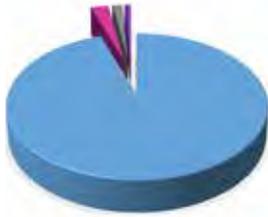
The media response to the Archbishop of Malta’s pronouncements on matters of social, ethical and moral importance makes clear the need for greater tolerance, especially among certain sections of the press in Malta. The impression created is that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, except the Archbishop.

Endnotes

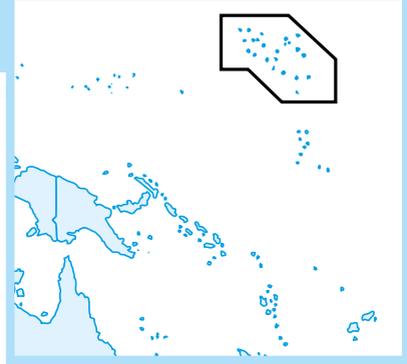
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MARSHALL ISLANDS

RELIGION



- Christians: 94,9%
- Baha'is: 2,7%
- Agnostics: 1,5%
- Others: 0,9%



AREA
181km²

POPULATION
53.100

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Marshall Islands are “two archipelagic island chains of 29 atolls, each made up of many small islets, and five single islands”.¹ They lie halfway between Hawaii and Australia.

The country’s constitution grants every person the right to “free exercise of religion”. “[R]easonable restrictions” on this right may be imposed by law, if they are “necessary to preserve public peace, order, health, or security or the rights or freedoms of others”.² Any such restrictions must achieve these aims by the least restrictive means possible and must not “penalise conduct on the basis of disagreement with the ideas or beliefs expressed”.³

Religious groups are not required to register with the government. Under the constitution, no executive or judicial act shall, either expressly or by practical application, discriminate on the basis of religion. The constitution also allows the government to fund “religiously supported institutions”⁴ that offer educational, medical or other social services on the condition that it does not discriminate between groups when it provides this funding.

Islanders are predominantly Christian and Christianity has been the main cultural influence since Western missionaries first visited the islands in the nineteenth century. Although there is no official state religion, governmental functions and other formal, public meetings often start and end with a Christian prayer. Figures vary with regard to denominational breakdown. Major religious groups include the United Church of Christ (which according to some sources represents 54.8 percent of the population), the Assemblies of God (25.8 percent) and the Roman Catholic Church (8.4 percent). Official statistics indicate that almost all natives to the country are Christians and many of those who were born overseas are also Christian. Minority religions include Baha’is, Iglesia ni Cristo, Jews, Hindus, Ahmadi Muslims, Baptists; these and other minorities collectively constitute less than percent of the population.⁵ In 2012, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community opened its first mosque in the capital, Majuro. It remains the only mosque in the Marshall Islands.

All indications suggest that the constitution’s provisions regarding freedom of religion are respected in practice. Independent monitors such as Freedom House have shown that they have not been breached.⁶

Incidents

Research yielded no reports of serious incidents during the period under review and there were few indications of societal tensions.

The construction of the Ahmadiyya mosque in 2012 was met with some local hostility at the time. The mosque was discussed in parliament in 2014.⁷ However, reports from 2017 suggest that concerns and suspicions have not hardened or noticeably persisted.⁸ In 2016 the local imam organised a world religions conference which was attended by Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus and atheists.

In the past, there has been passing comment on the more “aggressive evangelism” of newer religious groups that have come to the islands.⁹ However, such reports need to be seen in the context of widespread co-operation between different Christian denominations in events such as the 2017 Women’s Day of Prayer.¹⁰

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

There is nothing to suggest that the situation of religious freedom in the Marshall Islands will change in the near future.

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MAURITANIA

RELIGION



- Muslims: 99,1%
- Others: 0,9%



AREA	POPULATION
1.030.700km ²	4.166.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The sparsely populated West African state of Mauritania has been an Islamic Republic since the country gained independence in 1960. It is the only Islamic state of its kind in Africa, now that the Islamic Republic of Gambia, which is also in the west of the continent, has returned to being a secular republic.¹ The fact that the population of Mauritania is almost entirely Muslim has a profound impact on everyday life in the country.

Islam is the country's state religion, and citizenship is reserved for Muslims. Renunciation of Islam carries the death penalty.² It is significant that religious freedom is not mentioned in the constitution of 1991. Moreover, article 23 holds that the country's president must be a Muslim.³

The few members of other religions in the country have no way to live out their faith, at least not publicly. Shari'a is applied to questions of civil law in Mauritania, particularly concerning family issues. In some areas, violations of Shari'a are severely punished – through flogging, for example. Capital punishment for renunciation of Islam is a penalty that has not actually been carried to date (as at March 2018).⁴ Officially, the traditionally nomadic population of Mauritania is 100 percent Muslim. These are almost exclusively Sunnis,⁵ mostly organised in Sufi brotherhoods such as the Qadiriya, the Tijāniyyah and the Hamawiya. Chinguetti is one of the holy cities of Islam.

Incidents

During the reporting period, international attention continued concerning Internet blogger Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed, who was sentenced to death in 2014 for blasphemy. In a blog post, he had criticised the social exclusion of the caste of the forgeron ("metal-smiths") and the abuse of religion in discrimination against ethnic and social minorities. On 9th November 2017, an appeals court in Nouadhibou reduced the sentence to two years' imprisonment and a fine.⁶ Mohamed had already spent four years in custody and as, in the court's view, he had served his sentence, he was released. He still lives in fear

for his life, however. Devout Muslims in many cities of Mauritania took to the streets in protest at the judicial decision and demanded that the death sentence be carried out.⁷

The government of Mauritania responded by introducing the mandatory death penalty for blasphemy and apostasy, thus in effect tightening blasphemy legislation.⁸ In late November 2017, a legislative reform was adopted under which blasphemy or apostasy would be punishable by death even if the defendant were to apologise for his or her actions. According to human rights organisations, disputes are now subject to an even greater risk of arbitrariness and abuse. Blasphemy regulations are regularly abused in many Muslim states, for example in neighbourhood disputes and other interpersonal conflicts. Until recently, article 306 of the Mauritanian Penal Code only provided for the death penalty if the accused refused to show remorse. The last time the death penalty was carried out in the country was in 1987.⁹

The conspicuous presence of radical Islam in Mauritanian society also provide an opening for jihadist groups from abroad who seek to gain a foothold in West Africa.¹⁰ Mauritania has been considered relatively secure to date, but there are signs that Islamist jihadism is spreading in the country.¹¹ In 2017, in the context of the 'G5 Sahel' organisation, the Sahel countries of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad joined forces to combat violence, organised crime, state instability and terrorism, drawing on a unit of 5,000 soldiers. The G5 Sahel alliance is controlled from Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania. In mid-December 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel joined the G5 Sahel countries in increasing military resources to combat terrorism. The army was due to be operational by mid-2018. This deadline is questionable, however, as the army lacks equipment and training.¹²

According to a study published by the NSI American think tank, the spread of jihadism is linked to many factors.¹³ In terms of ideology, the Sahel zone is a rather difficult area for jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, the study points out. The people of the region are generally not noted for their religious fervour. However, the susceptibility to extremist movements has also increased in the Sahel. This results from the spread of Wahhabism, the interpretation of Sunni Islam native to Saudi Arabia. There are concerns that the growth in jihadist Islam could cause political and economic crisis. The risk of jihadism in the Sahel region is great as large swaths of this area are essentially free from any state oversight. This is also the poorest Muslim-majority area in the world, with weak governments and a lack of national identity.

The danger of falling prey to Islamist jihadists emanates particularly from Mali, Mauritania's neighbour to the east.¹⁴ There are still many armed groups in Mali; some side with the government, some are aligned with insurgents. Terrorist militias are linked to Ansar al Dine, a local terrorist organization, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb or Daesh (ISIS).

Daesh and Al-Qaeda are now no longer fighting just in the north of Mali but in the middle of the country as well.¹⁵ In central Mali, with the city of Mopti at its centre, nomads are fighting resident farmers for fertile land and the terrorists are exploiting this conflict. They

have stepped in to act as mediators in a dispute over grazing grounds. This is how they have gradually seized power in the villages before introducing Shari'a law.

That the nomads are able to make such inroads is because the government is too weak to enforce law and order across the towns and villages.¹⁶ According to observers, there are three reasons for this.¹⁷ Soldiers and policemen mostly come from ethnic groups who settle in the south of Mali. They refuse to risk their lives in northern and central Mali, where they cannot speak the local language. Besides, the military and police forces are poorly equipped. They have no chance against the often better-armed and highly motivated jihadists. Thirdly, many people join the terrorists because they are poor and have no future prospects. They feel abandoned by the state.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Developments regarding religious life in Mauritania and the situation of the small religious minority depend a great deal on two factors. The first concerns domestic developments. There are no signs whatsoever to suggest that the current government of Mauritania will help promote the basic right of religious freedom. The influence of Islamic conservative forces in the government and in Mauritanian society is great. This is likely to remain the case in future as well. The second factor relates to developments abroad within West Africa. Mali is not the only country in which the influence of Islamist jihadism has increased. Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria are also among the countries that suffer significantly from the influence and violence of extremists. It remains to be seen whether the Western units stationed in the region, now joined to the regional G5 Sahel alliance, have the capability to contain this influence.

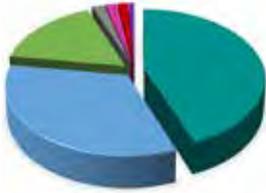
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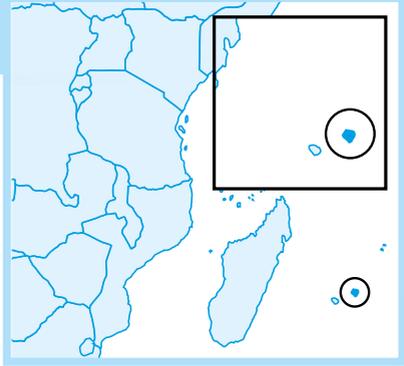
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MAURITIUS

RELIGION



● Hindus: 44,2%
● Christians: 33,2%
● Muslims: 16,7%
● Agnostics: 1,8%
● Baha'is: 1,8%
● Chinese Folk Religionists: 1,4%
● Others: 0,9%



AREA

1.969 km²

POPULATION

1.277.000

Legal framework on religious freedom and actual application

The 1968 Mauritius constitution (revised and amended in 2016) declares religious freedom to be a fundamental right,¹ thus prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of religious affiliation. People can convert to other religions and believers can distribute religious material to those who are not part of their group. Nobody, however, can exert coercion and thus no one can be forced to follow precepts or attend the services of any religious group. New religious groups can be founded and registered. The government protects rights, but its regulation of religion is fairly unintrusive.² Residence permits for missionaries are limited to three years with no extensions.³

Religious education is present in both in state and private schools. Furthermore, the government regularly grants subsidies to religious groups according to their number of followers as indicated in the national census.⁴

Incidents

Ethnic tensions still exist in the country, especially between Muslims and the Hindu majority. This mirrors divisions that are strongly linked to ethnicity and religious affiliation.⁵ Similarly, the Creole community (mostly mixed-race descendants of former slaves who follow Catholicism) feels itself discriminated compared with other groups, particularly in their access to jobs.⁶ However, no major violent incident due to religion has been reported and the general situation is somehow better than in previous years.

The Council of Religions (CDR) has promoted harmony, dialogue and peaceful coexistence between religions since 2001. Its nucleus is the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic and Jewish groups – the main religious traditions in the country, but it also involves many smaller denominations.⁷ The council promotes, among other things, interreligious education in schools and has worked with the Ministry of Education in the production of a curriculum for intercultural education.⁸

Two mosques and a Muslim cemetery in the Savanne District have reported damage, including graffiti. In the case of the cemetery, local press suspected that the perpetrators were supporters of the Hindu Patriotic Organisation (Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, HSS).⁹

A Tamil temple was vandalised in Port Louis.¹⁰

Several Hindu places of worship were also vandalised in different parts of the country. Police have been accused of failing to find the culprits in such incidents.¹¹

The Council of Religions wrote a letter to the Prime Minister in order to complain about threats made via social media following emergency relief efforts to help victims of the Berguitta cyclone. These threats were directed against certain ethnic and religious groups (mainly Christian Creoles). The council called on the government to adopt tougher legislation to counter such acts.¹²

Bottles of fruit juice tainted with kerosene and insecticide were allegedly distributed among pilgrims during the Hindu Festival of Maha Shivaratri in Vandermeesh, Rose Hill and Phoenix. There were no reports of casualties.¹³

Prospects for freedom of religion

In the present context, no relevant changes are expected for the foreseeable future.

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MEXICO

RELIGION



- Christians: 95,9%
- Agnostics: 2,7%
- Ethnoreligionists: 1,1%
- Others: 0,3%



AREA	POPULATION
1.964.375km ²	128.632.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article one of the Mexican constitution¹ states that all government authorities have an obligation to promote, respect, protect and guarantee human rights. The same article bans discrimination on grounds of ethnic or national origin, gender, age, disabilities, social condition, health conditions, religion, opinions, sexual preferences, marital status or any other factor that might offend human dignity.

According to article three of the constitution, state education must be secular and should not include any references to religious doctrine.

Article 24 of the constitution contains elements of article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It states: "Every person has the right to have freedom of ethical convictions, of conscience and of religion, and to have or to adopt, as the case may be, the one of her preference. Such freedom includes the right to participate, individually or collectively, in both public and private ceremonies, worship or religious acts of the respective cult, as long as they are not a felony or a misdemeanour punished by law." It goes on to say: "No person is allowed to use these public acts of religious expression for political ends, for campaigning or as means of political propaganda."

Article 27 refers to the capacity of religious associations constituted under the terms of article 130 of the constitution, as well as the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship² (the statute that regulates article 24 of the constitution), to acquire, possess or administer assets.

Articles 55 and 58 of the constitution preclude members of the clergy from becoming federal deputies or senators.

Article 130, which sets out the historic principle of separation of church and state, states that churches and religious groups cannot obtain legal recognition as religious organisations unless they register with the relevant authorities. The latter, however, cannot intervene in the internal life of the religious associations. Mexican citizens are permitted to exercise ministry in any religion of their choice.

Under the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship, members of the clergy may not hold public office. They can vote but they cannot be elected. They can neither associate for political purposes nor preach for or against any candidate, party or political association; nor can they oppose national laws or institutions in public meetings, acts of worship, religious propaganda, or publications of a religious nature. Members of the clergy cannot inherit from people whom they have helped spiritually and to whom they are not related to the fourth degree.

In addition, religious associations and members of the clergy cannot own or administer telecommunications concessions, except for printed publications of a religious nature.

The same law contains 32 articles that refer to: the nature, constitution and operation of religious associations; their associates, members and representatives of the clergy; their patrimonial regime; their religious acts of public worship; the role of the authorities; as well as offences and penalties. The law provides that religious beliefs are not grounds to ask for an exemption from compliance with the laws of the country. The state shall exercise its authority over any individual or collective religious activities, if they contravene the provisions of the constitution, international treaties ratified by Mexico and other applicable legislation.

Churches and other religious groups must meet a set of requirements to obtain legal recognition.³ Religious associations have the right to set up and run administrative structures governing their activities, perform acts of public worship and manage private welfare institutions, educational establishments and health institutions as long as they are not for profit.

In order to engage in religious acts of public worship outside places designated for the purpose, organisers must give prior notice to the authorities, who may prohibit the act for reasons of security, health protection, morality, quiet and public order or to protect the rights of third parties.

The federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination⁴ deems it discriminatory to place limits on the free expression of ideas and or to hinder freedom of thought, conscience or religion, or religious practices or customs, provided that these do not violate public order.

On 11th May 2018, an amendment to the General Health Law was approved. This recognises the right of medical and nursing staff who are part of the national health system to make conscientious objection and not to provide certain services, which otherwise they would be required by law to provide, if those services are contrary to their convictions; except in those cases in which the life of the patient is at risk and in the case of a medical emergency. In addition, the amendment states that conscientious objection cannot be grounds for employment discrimination.⁵ This provision can only be applied to medical and nursing staff. General restrictions on conscientious objection remain in place.

On 12th April 2018, Deputies Carlos Iriarte Mercado and José Hugo Cabrera Ruiz put forward a proposal to extend various provisions of the Law on Religious Associations and Public Worship and repeal other ones.⁶ If approved, it would improve the legal framework

that protects the right to religious freedom by making it conform to the legislation of other OECD member countries. Proposed changes including giving people various rights, such as the right to conscientious objection based on religious or ethical principles, the right to associate, meet or demonstrate peacefully and express their religious beliefs in relation to matters of a public nature and the right to contribute money or make contributions in kind in support of religious associations. Another change would grant religious associations the right to acquire real estate without prior approval of the Ministry of the Interior, and the right to own or manage concessions to operate radio, television or other forms of media.

Incidents

During the period under review, violence towards priests continued to rise. On 5th July 2017 Father Luis López, of the diocese of Nezahualcóyotl, was murdered at home in the state of Mexico.⁷ Father José Miguel Machorro was attacked on 15th May 2017 at the metropolitan cathedral of the archdiocese of Mexico and died that August.⁸

On 4th February 2018, Father Germaín Muñiz, of the diocese of Chilpancingo-Chilapa, and Father Iván Añorve, of the archdiocese of Acapulco, were killed as they drove along the Iguala-Taxco highway in the state of Guerrero.⁹

In April, three more priests were killed:¹⁰ Father Rubén Alcántara, of the diocese of Izcalli, was attacked with a knife on 19th April inside his parish in the state of Mexico; on 21st April, Father Juan Miguel, of the archdiocese of Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco, was attacked in his parish by two armed men; finally, Father José Moisés, of the archdiocese of Mexico, was found dead on 27th April in the state of Morelos, after his family had reported his abduction.¹¹

Several priests have complained of threats and extortion by organised crime. In some places protective measures have been taken. In May 2018 the diocese of Zacatecas announced the suspension of evening and Masses to prevent priests from being exposed to attacks.

On 25th July 2017 an explosive device was detonated at the main door of the headquarters of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Mexico, a few metres from the basilica in Guadalupe.¹²

Several Catholic leaders have spoken out against the violence carried out against priests. Bishop Salvador Rangel of the diocese of Chilpancingo, Guerrero, reported that, after receiving threats, priests have abandoned their communities for fear of being killed.¹³ Father Omar Sotelo, director of the Catholic Multimedia Centre, stated that clergy have been threatened, and tortured before being killed.¹⁴ The Archbishop of Morelia, Michoacán, Carlos Garfías Merlos, has stated that violence against the clergy and widespread insecurity in various communities are threats to the activities of the Church.¹⁵

In addition to the violent attacks against priests, Bishop Ramón Castro, Bishop of Cuernavaca, Morelos, has denounced the harassment he has endured for denouncing a series of abuses, omissions and excesses committed by the state government.¹⁶ In response, the

state governor, Graco Ramírez, has accused the bishop of plotting against his government by holding meetings with opposition social leaders and inciting violence in a community of the diocese.¹⁷ According to the bishop, this persecution has been going on since 2013.¹⁸

The Catholic Church has not been the only religious body affected by violence. Members of the clergy of other denominations have also reported that they have been the victims of robbery, kidnapping and extortion, according to Arturo Farela, president of the National Confraternity of Evangelical Christian Churches. Farela noted that the states with the greatest number of attacks are Chiapas, Oaxaca, Jalisco, Veracruz, Guerrero, Coahuila and Chihuahua.¹⁹

The Mexican Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights notes that no clear figures are available for the number of people displaced for religious reasons, as many of the conflicts tend to combine political, territorial and religious factors.²⁰

On 4th December 2017, in Tuxpan de Bolaños, in the state of Jalisco, 48 indigenous Huichol converts to other denominations and religious groups (Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelicals and Baptists), were expelled from their community for refusing to hold local government positions, which would have contravened their religious precepts.²¹

On 15th March 2018, Luis Herrera, of the Christian Voices organisation, complained that in San Miguel Chiptic, a village in the municipality of Altamirano in Chiapas, several people destroyed three homes belonging to families that converted to the Adventist church. He added that the authorities have not taken steps to ensure that local residents can profess their religion in freedom.²²

On 21st April 2018, in Acteal, a village in the municipality of Chenalhó in Chiapas, a group of armed people attacked a house of the Catholic association called The Bees. The group reported that the attackers were members of the Ecological Green Party of Mexico, which leads the local government. Weeks later, the parish of Chenalhó called for a pilgrimage to Acteal but ultimately decided against it because of the risk of attack. This village is of special interest because in 1997 the community was attacked by a paramilitary group who killed 45 people.²³

Prospects for freedom of religion

The period under review shows that the number of attacks against priests and other pastoral agents have increased over previous years.²⁴ As organised crime grows, the chances of ending violence against priests diminish. Members of the clergy are in a particularly dangerous situation, since they are the ones who continually denounce attacks or abuses by organised crime, government or other groups towards themselves or members of their communities. It is relatively easy to find out the number of religious leaders murdered by organised crime, but information about the number of threats they receive on a daily basis in relation to their pastoral activity is not so accessible, especially in areas where the conflict is worst. The situation is of great concern to Mexico's Catholic Bishops, who have expressed their dismay in several press releases, demanding justice for the murder-

red priests and denouncing the country's precarious situation.²⁵ The authorities, which sometimes heed the calls, lose interest as soon as media attention fades.

In addition, there are no clear figures regarding the number of people displaced for religious reasons. In many cases, these conflicts do not go beyond the national media or do not receive a proper follow-up by the authorities, so it is also not possible to analyse the efficacy of steps taken to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Even though the recognition of the right to conscientious objection in the reform of the General Health Law is a move in the right direction, it is still limited since it grants this right only to medical and nursing staff. In addition, the text of the reform goes against the provisions of the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship. Article one continues to indicate that "religious convictions do not give exemption in any case from compliance with the laws of the country. No one can claim religious reasons for evading the responsibilities and obligations prescribed by the law". These are all reasons given for amending the regulatory law.

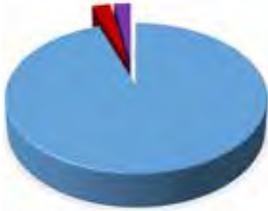
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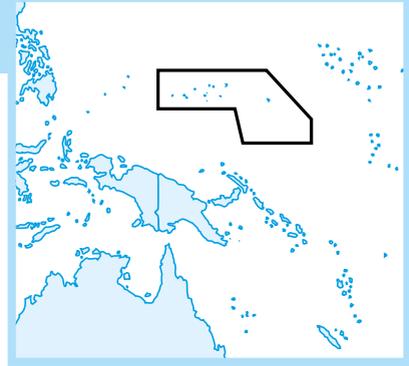
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MICRONESIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 94,7%
- Ethnoreligionists: 2,8%
- Others: 2,5%



AREA
702km²

POPULATION
105.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Federal States of Micronesia are found in the eastern Caroline Islands, a widely scattered archipelago in the Pacific Ocean. The eastern four island groups are about three-quarters of the way from Hawaii to Indonesia.

Micronesia's constitution (Article 4 – Declaration of Rights), excludes the possibility of a state religion being established. The same article also expressly forbids any law which restricts religious freedom.¹

Religious demography figures vary. According to 2010 estimates, 54.7 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. A further 41.1 percent is Protestant, the majority belonging to the Congregational Church (38.5 percent).² There are small numbers of Baha'is, Ahmadi Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Jews. In Yap State, Catholics make up approximately 80 percent of the population. The Congregational Church is prominent in Kosrae State where it is estimated that 90 percent of the population is Protestant. Elsewhere, the demographics are more evenly balanced between Catholics and Protestants.

There are no indications that the central government pursues policies or allows practices at odds with constitutional safeguards regarding religious freedom. Religious groups are not required to register with the state. Public schools do not provide religious education but private schools may teach religion in addition to the government-approved curriculum. The government may fund non-religious activities in parochial schools. Private church schools receive state grants. Official functions and events often begin with a Christian prayer led by a Catholic or a Protestant minister. An inter-denominational council exists in Pohnpei to address social problems and promote official co-operation between Protestants and Catholics.³ The US State Department religious freedom 2016 report notes that other groups, including Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses, view the council's charter as not inclusive.⁴

Incidents

The establishment of an Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Kosrae State in 2011 was met with some hostility. In 2014, around 1,000 people signed a petition calling for Islam to be banned from Kosrae.⁵ A news report details incidents of intolerance in Kosrae State towards the Muslim community. Proposals were introduced at a municipal level aimed at introducing ordinances banning Islam or alternatively imposing taxes on Muslims.⁶ In response, in January 2016 the Department of Justice made a public statement that any actions which violated the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion would be taken seriously on grounds that they could give rise to criminal liability.⁷

The same report also details sporadic acts of hostility towards Muslims, including rocks thrown at their vehicles, vandalism of property and one taxi firm refusing its services to Muslims.⁸ In March 2017, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community held an Annual Conference of Peace which was attended by government officials, as well as representatives of the Congregational Church, the Catholic Church, the Seventh Day Adventists and other Christian denominations.⁹ In October 2017, an event aimed at removing misconceptions about Ahmadiyya Islam and promoting its peaceful understanding of Islam was held in Pohnpei and was attended by the US ambassador.¹⁰

Prospects for freedom of religion

Both the authorities and representatives of the main religious communities, as well as individuals within each community, have sent clear signals that they are committed to religious co-existence and constitutional guarantees regarding freedom of religion. Despite concerns about sporadic acts of discrimination and hostility, there is no reason to think that tensions will significantly undermine these legal obligations and existing social relations.

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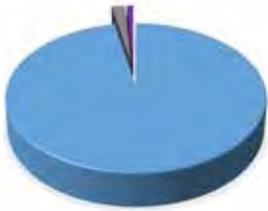
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MOLDOVA

RELIGION



- Christians: 97%
- Agnostics: 2%
- Others: 1%



MOLDOVA

AREA	POPULATION
33.846km ²	4.063.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The right to freedom of religion or belief in Moldova is enshrined in its 1994 constitution,¹ which gives people the right to worship independently and autonomously from the state (Article 31 on freedom of conscience), the right to peacefully gather (Article 40 on freedom of assembly), and the right to equality regardless of religion or belief (Article 16 on equality).

Although these freedoms are guaranteed by the constitution and there is no official state religion, the Moldovan Orthodox Church (MOC) acts as the unofficial state religion.

The Law on Religious Denominations and their Component Parts No. 125 of 11th May 2007 (which revises the 1992 Law on Religious Denominations) regulates the relations between the state and religious associations. The law highlights the role of the MOC. Article 15 paragraph 5 states, “The state recognises the special importance and leading role of the Orthodox Christian religion and, respectively, the Moldovan Orthodox Church in the life, history and culture of the people of Moldova.”² Under Article 4 paragraph 4, the law prohibits “abusive proselytism”.³

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) oversees the registration process for religious groups. There is no requirement to register but there are benefits in doing so. Registered religions may establish associations and foundations, be exempt from paying real estate and land taxes, own property and land in cemeteries, apply for temporary residency permits for missionaries, build churches, publish religious literature, open bank accounts, and hire employees.⁴

If a group is denied or declines registration as a religious entity, it may try to register as a civil organisation.

There are 52 religious entities officially recognised by the Moldovan government.⁵ Some minority religious groups have had problems with registration. Two cases were taken to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) by the applicants: the case of Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and Others v. Moldova (2002)⁶ and the case of Cârmuirea Spirituală a Musulmanilor din Republica Moldova v. Moldova (2005).⁷

The situation in the separatist region of Transnistria has remained unchanged since a ceasefire agreement in 1992. It is a de facto state that is not recognised by the international community. Moldova designates it as the Transnistria Autonomous Territorial Unit with Special Legal Status. As a result of the failure to establish a common constitution for both Moldova and Transnistria, two constitutions, two parliaments, and two sets of laws govern the official territory of Moldova and its separatist region.⁸

In Transnistria, about 80 percent of the population belongs to the Moldovan Orthodox Church (MOC). Other religious groups include Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, Jews, Lutherans, Evangelical and charismatic Christians, and Old Rite Orthodoxy followers.⁹

The Transnistrian constitution requires that religious organisations be registered in order to enjoy certain benefits, although registration is not required. Preference is given by law to the MOC and in practice the requirements for registration make it difficult for many religious minority groups to function properly in the region. Oversight of the law on religious freedom is given to the Prosecutor's Office.¹⁰

Incidents

In the case of *Mozer v. The Republic of Moldova and Russia*,¹¹ "the applicant submitted, in particular, that he had been arrested and detained unlawfully" on the territory of the self-proclaimed Moldavian Republic of Transnistria (MRT). He also complained that he had been denied access to a pastor for spiritual assistance although "such a refusal was incompatible with the 'MRT constitution and laws'".¹²

As Transnistria is not a member of the Council of Europe, the complaint was filed against the Republic of Moldova, which has lost control of the breakaway territory, but also against Russia as the power co-ruling it with the separatists. The application was declared admissible by the European Court. In its judgement,¹³ the court ruled by sixteen votes to one that, among other things, the Russian Federation had violated Article 13 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in conjunction with Articles 3, 8 and 9 (Freedom of thought, conscience and religion).

The Supreme Court of Justice in Moldova denied the appeal of two Moldova-based Falun Gong organisations, which were ordered dissolved by lower courts due to their use of a spiritual symbol that contains the swastika, something that is classified as extremist under the law.¹⁴ However, in Asia, where the group originated, the symbol has no connection with Nazism.

Leaders of Moldova's Jehovah's Witnesses claim that police ignored reported instances of physical assault, threats, and verbal abuse against their members.¹⁵

Two types of optional religious courses are available in state-run schools: a specific curriculum for Orthodox and Roman Catholics and another curriculum for Evangelical Christians and Seventh-day Adventists.¹⁶

The Seventh-day Adventists' Reform Movement experienced problems enrolling their children in schools because they refuse to have them vaccinated.¹⁷

The Jewish Community of Moldova reported an increase in anti-Semitic acts. In addition, they claim that the police did nothing about vandalism and hate speech towards the community.¹⁸

In Transnistria, Jehovah's Witnesses continued to report harassment, assaults, verbal abuse, discrimination and restriction on their activities by local authorities.¹⁹

Prospects for freedom of religion

The main issue for religious freedom in Moldova is the tiered system of religions in which the MOC occupies a privileged position, registered religious associations enjoy certain rights, but unregistered groups, being unduly refused the status of registered religious associations, are denied their religious identity by the state.

Furthermore, the legal black hole that results from the situation in Transnistria continues to be a barrier for religious minorities to find any real legal redress to their complaints.

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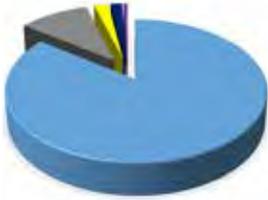
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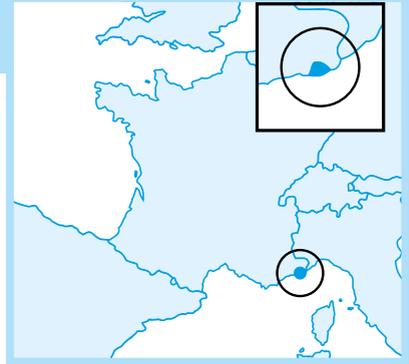
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MONACO

RELIGION



● Christians: 85,2%
● Agnostics: 10,4%
● Atheists: 2,1%
● Jews: 1,7%
● Others: 0,6%



MONACO

AREA
2km²

POPULATION
37.900

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution of the principality establishes Roman Catholicism as the religion of the state.¹ It states that all Monegasques – citizens of Monaco – are equal in the eyes of the law, and that there are no individual privileges among them.²

Article 23 guarantees to all individuals, including non-citizens, “freedom of religion and of public worship, and freedom to express one’s opinions in all matters, [. . .] subject to the right to prosecute any offences committed in the exercise of the said freedoms”. No one may be compelled “to participate in the activities and ceremonies of a religion or to observe its days of rest”.³

There have been no reports of significant institutional changes. Although Roman Catholicism is the state religion, the government recognises all Abrahamic religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. There are several Catholic churches, two Protestant churches, one Greek Orthodox church, and one synagogue. There are no mosques but, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, some Muslim residents use private prayer rooms in their homes for worship.⁴

Incidents

No notable incidents relating to religious freedom have been reported since 2016. However, on 9th June 2017, an agitated individual demanding answers to questions about the Vatican, assaulted a priest called Father Jean-Christophe Genson in the sacristy of the Church of Sainte-Dévote. The attacker was subsequently brought to the psychiatric unit of a hospital.⁵ There were no other incidents against Christians or members of minority religions during the period under review.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

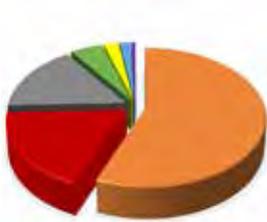
In the absence of reports involving religious minorities and no sign of any problems relating to religious freedom, significant changes are not foreseen in the near future.

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MONGOLIA

RELIGION



- Buddhists: 56,1%
- Ethnoreligionists: 18,3%
- Agnostics: 15,9%
- Muslims: 5%
- Atheists: 2,3%
- Christians: 1,8%
- Others: 0,6%



AREA	POPULATION
1.564.116km ²	3.006.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In the last two years, Mongolia has seen little constitutional or legal change with respect to freedom of religion. Following the collapse of the USSR in 1989, the end of Soviet domination brought a return to religious freedom. Mongolia's constitution, adopted on 13th January 1992, guarantees all fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of religion, and officially upholds the principle of separation of the state and religion. Although the Buddhism practised by Mongolians¹ has no status as an official religion, Mongolian law nevertheless asserts that the government must "respect" Buddhism as the majority religion – an affirmation justified by the need to preserve the unity of the country and defend Mongolian history and culture. The law also states that the respect due to Buddhism by the state "cannot prevent a citizen from practising another religion".

The promise of religious freedom, seen when the country came into being in the 1990s, has not been realised. Instead, a restrictive and intrusive bureaucracy has sought to restrain religious communities deemed "foreign" to the national culture. Mongolia's Christians have suffered particularly.

Religious communities in Mongolia are treated in the same way as NGOs. They are forced to meet many complex regulations and administrative requirements. They must register with a state agency, the General Authority for Intellectual Property and State Registration. Because the law is unclear about how long registration certificates issued by this body remain valid, it is, in fact, local governments that determine their duration.

In practice, religious organisations are obliged to renew their registration certificates every year. To do so, they must apply to six different administrative bodies at the local and national levels. This process is long, tedious and unpredictable, as some provinces are more reluctant than others to provide registration certificates.

Another extremely restrictive condition which applies to all foreign organisations, and thus to religious communities, is the requirement of a minimum percentage of Mongolian employees among their staff. This percentage varies between 25 percent and 95 percent depending on the sector of activity. Each year, a list of required percentages is published; most religious organisations are automatically subjected to the maximum quota of 95

percent of local employees. Many religious organisations have objected to this system as much of their staff and funding originate largely outside of Mongolia. The Catholic Church is an exception because, unlike almost all other religious organisations with NGO status and mandatory 95 percent local staffing, the Catholic Church has managed to obtain a quota of only 75 percent.

Incidents

The Dalai Lama visited Ulaanbaatar in November 2016. At the invitation of the Gandantegchinlen Monastery, one of the main centres of Tibetan Buddhism, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists spent four days in the Mongolian capital. The government of the People's Republic of China, Mongolia's southern neighbour, warned the government in Ulaanbaatar that it would face consequences if it allowed such a visit (Communist China considers the Dalai Lama a "separatist"). Following the Dalai Lama's departure, the Chinese government retaliated with economic measures against Mongolia: the land border between the two countries was blocked for several days; additional taxes were imposed on imports from Mongolia; bilateral meetings were postponed; and Chinese government loans were cancelled at a time when the Mongolian government's budget was already overstretched and the country was lagging in economic growth.² After asserting that their constitution upheld the right to religious freedom and therefore the right of Mongolian citizens to welcome the religious leaders of their choice, the Mongolian government was forced to make amends and concede to Beijing that the Dalai Lama would no longer be permitted to enter the country. On 20th December 2016, Mongolian Foreign Minister Tsend Munkh-Orgil told the Mongolian newspaper Unuudur that "Under this current government, the Dalai Lama will not be invited to Mongolia, even for religious reasons."² As of October 2017, Mr Munkh-Orgil is no longer foreign minister and the government has changed, and officially the question of a visit by the Dalai Lama to Mongolia is no longer an issue.³

The government's attitude toward religions other than Buddhism has not changed in recent years. In the 1990s the government appealed to Christian Churches, including the Catholic Church, to set up charities and engage in social outreach in a country where the needs for development were substantial. Since 2010, attitudes if not the laws have hardened, at least towards religious organisations regarded as "foreign". The hiring quota for local staff weighs heavily on the finances of recently established organisations or those led mainly by foreign personnel.⁴

Under Mongolian law, the head of a religious organisation must be a Mongolian national. Religious communities, especially Christian ones, without native Mongolian clergy, can own land only if the title deed is held by a Mongolian citizen. Registering these titles and religious depends at least in part on the goodwill of the administration. The Central Province, with its strong Buddhist tradition, seems less disposed to allow the opening of Christian churches, whereas other provinces, such as that of Erdenet,⁵ remain more open to foreigners.

Prospects for religious freedom

As it faces serious economic difficulties, Mongolia cannot escape the influence of its neighbour, China. Freedoms gained in the aftermath of the fall of communism seem to be well established and in this respect, freedom of religion seems to be much better respected in Mongolia than in China. However, economic difficulties and rapid social change have prompted local authorities to distrust religions deemed new to the country, such as Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic. Despite these institutional and cultural obstructions, and even in the face of rapid secularisation in Mongolia, Christian communities in particular continue to expand.

Endnotes

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MONTENEGRO

RELIGION



- Christians: 78,6%
- Muslims: 17,3%
- Agnostics: 3,5%
- Others: 0,6%



AREA

13.812km²

POPULATION

626.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 46 of the constitution guarantees freedom of religious belief. The right to express religious beliefs is limited only by the need to protect the life and health of others, public peace and order. Article 14 stipulates that religious communities shall be equal and free in the exercise of religious rites and religious affairs and that they are separate from the state.

Religious groups must register with the local police within 15 days of their establishment in order to receive the status of a legal entity. The police must then file this registration with the Ministry of the Interior. Religious organisations must have at least two members to register.

Religious communities registered in Montenegro include the Church of Christ's Gospel, Catholic Mission Tuzi, Christian Adventist Church, Evangelistic Church, Army Order of Hospitable Believers of Saint Lazar of Jerusalem for Montenegro, Franciscan Mission for Malesija, Biblical Christian Community, Bahais, Montenegrin Community, Christian Adventist Church, Buddhists, Protestants, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Jewish community.¹

The Government enters into individual accords with religious organisations. Separate agreements have been concluded so far between the Government of Montenegro and the Catholic, Islamic and Jewish communities.² These agreements do not replace the requirement of registration. There is no similar agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church or the Montenegrin Orthodox Church.

Many of the country's official public holidays are based on the Orthodox liturgical calendar. Additional Catholic, Muslim and Jewish holidays are also observed.

The Legal Status of Religious Communities Act 1977³ is still in force in Montenegro. This law dates back to the time when Montenegro was one of the constitutive republics of the then Yugoslavia. A new Freedom of Religion Law was drafted to regulate the status of churches and other religious communities in secular Montenegrin society. However, the draft has not been finalised. Under the draft, it was proposed that all the churches and monasteries built before 1918 would become state property and part of the country's

cultural heritage. Religious communities would also have had to start paying taxes, and have been obliged to “confidentially inform the government” prior to appointing officials. After the religious communities submitted 4,501 remarks the Ministry had to withdraw the draft for further consideration.

Although announced for the end of 2017, a new draft law has not yet been presented to the public. According to the Director-General for Relations with religious Communities at the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, Ms Žana Filipović, a new preliminary draft is currently being considered. However, she was not in a position to say when it would be presented to Parliament.⁴

On 3rd September 2017, after 70 years of waiting, the Diocese of Bar, the oldest religious institution in Montenegro, blessed and dedicated the new co-cathedral of Saint Peter the Apostle. A special Mass was celebrated by the retired Archbishop Zef Gashi. The cornerstone for the new co-cathedral in Bar was laid in 2011.

In December 2017, Montenegro’s state politicians joined members of the Jewish community to lay the cornerstone for a new synagogue in Podgorica. The Government of Montenegro gave the land for a synagogue in 2013. According to local newspapers that will be the first synagogue constructed in the Balkans this century.⁵

For the first time in over a century, the Jewish community of Montenegro has its own resident rabbi, Ari Edelkopf, a Los Angeles-born Chabad rabbi. Mr Edelkopf is also Montenegro’s first resident rabbi since Montenegro became independent in 2006. The Jewish community in Montenegro is the youngest and probably one of the smallest Jewish communities in the world today. According to the most recent census, about 300 Jews live in Montenegro.

A group of 30 Muslim inhabitants from Rozaje, a town situated on the Montenegro-Kosovo border, recently proved that the religious tolerance is very alive among common people in Montenegro. While working abroad, they heard that the local Orthodox church of Saint John the Baptist desperately needed reconstruction. They collected the money and helped the Orthodox parishioners to replace warped and damaged wooden doors and windows. Rozaje is a Muslim majority town and only two percent of the residents are Orthodox believers.⁶

Incidents

On 1st October 2017, in order to avoid physical conflict between supporters of the Montenegro Orthodox Church and supporters of the Serbian Orthodox Church, local Cetinje police prevented the Montenegro Orthodox Archbishop and clergy from celebrating a Mass for King Nikola and his family in Ćipuri Monastery in Cetinje.⁷

The mayor of the Montenegrin capital Podgorica, Slavoljub Stijepovic, filed a criminal complaint against unknown perpetrators “dressed like priests”, for holding a Mass on disputed property. The mayor’s criminal complaint said that unknown perpetrators broke in to the former marketplace in the Konik neighborhood, and trespassed on municipality

land. The criminal complaint was submitted after Serbian Orthodox priests, led by Amfilohije Radovic, held a Mass on 23rd April 2017 in a disused marketplace, to mark the start of construction of a new church consecrated to Saint Vasilije Ostroski.⁸

The restoration of a historical monument in Podgorica caused a public disagreement between Muslims and the Orthodox. During the reconstruction process, a 100-year-old metal cross was removed from the top of a clock tower (Sahat Kula) built in 1667 by Ottoman ruler Adži-paša Osmanagić. The Islamic Community insists that the metal cross should not be brought back because it is not part of the original Islamic architecture. The Serbian Orthodox Church is demanding that the cross be returned to the tower as soon as possible. The restoration project has been financed with one million euros from Turkey's TIKA agency.

The Serbian Orthodox Church strongly opposed the Government plans to build several hydro-electric power plants on the Moraca River in the northern part of the country. The church officials said the government plan would endanger the existence of a 13th century monastery which is one of the most important pilgrimage shrines in Montenegro.⁹

Prospects for freedom of religion

One year after Montenegro was officially admitted into NATO there are not a lot of positive changes that can be seen in the everyday life of Montenegrin citizens. The reforms have generally slowed down. The unemployment rate increased to 24 percent in 2017. The general public considers the government as highly inefficient and corrupt.

The draft law on religious freedom has not yet been adopted, despite promises.

The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church continue their dispute over the ownership of religious properties in Montenegro. The Serbian Orthodox Church's clergy continues to use offensive rhetoric, which sometimes verges on hate-speech, and seeks to interfere in the affairs of the state and politics. Setting aside the conflict between the two Orthodox Churches, relations between religious groups are amicable and tolerant. It remains to be seen whether the rather unstable political and economic situation will significantly influence the traditionally religiously tolerant Montenegrin society.

Endnotes

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MOROCCO

RELIGION



- Muslims: 99,6%
- Others: 0,4 %



AREA	POPULATION
446.550 km ²	34.817.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Morocco is a hereditary monarchy ruled by a Sunni dynasty which has reigned for centuries. The incumbent monarch is King Mohammed VI. He is considered to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. More than 99 percent of the country's population are Sunni Muslims of the Maliki-Ashari school. Other religious groups – including Jews – constitute less than 1 percent of the population. The Jewish community is very old and the majority left after the establishment of the State of Israel. Community leaders estimate the number of Jews to be, at most, only 4,000, with the majority living in Casablanca.¹

Christian leaders in the country estimate the number of Christians of all denominations to be as high as 40,000 (30,000 Roman Catholics and 10,000 Protestants). Unconfirmed sources give a number of just 5,000. The vast majority of Christians are foreigners. They use the churches built during the French protectorate era (1912-1956). It is not clear how many Muslim citizens have converted to Christianity; some put the figure as high as 8,000.² There are small Shia and Bahá'í groups living in the country. According to the Moroccan constitution, the country is a sovereign Muslim state. Article 3 reads: "Islam is the religion of the state, which guarantees to all the free exercise of beliefs."³ The constitution prohibits political parties, parliamentarians or constitutional amendments to infringe upon Islam.⁴ The European Parliament acknowledges that religious freedom is constitutionally enshrined in Morocco but adds that "Christians and especially Muslims who converted to Christianity face 'numerous forms of discrimination' and 'are not allowed to set foot in a church'".⁵

Article 41 states that the king, as the "Commander of the Faithful, sees to the respect for Islam." The article continues to state that he is the "Guarantor of the free exercise of beliefs", presiding over the Superior Council of the Ulemas. This council is solely empowered to comment and agree to religious consultations (Fatwas) being officially agreed in keeping with the "precepts and designs of Islam". The article adds that this council is established by Dahir [royal decree].⁶

Under the Moroccan Penal Code, proselytism by non-Muslims, that is to “shake the faith” of the Muslim population, is illegal.⁷ The distribution of non-Islamic religious materials is also restricted by the government.⁸

Article 220 of the Penal Code⁹ prescribes imprisonment of between six months to three years, plus a fine of 100 to 500 dirham (about US\$ 11-55/£ 8-39), for any person employing “means of seduction in order to convert” a Muslim to another religion by exploiting his weakness or his needs, by making use of “education, health, asylums and orphanage institutions” to achieve the conversion.¹⁰

Voluntary conversion is not a crime under the criminal or civil codes.¹¹ However, there were reported cases of people arrested, including a Moroccan convert to Christianity suspected of proselytising.¹² Morocco does not impose the death penalty against apostates from Islam under the provisions of its Penal Code.

Article 219 of the new Penal Code draft law “provides for ‘imprisonment from one year to five years’ against anyone guilty of ‘undermining,’ ‘offending,’ or ‘insulting’ God and the prophets by any means.”¹³ Under Article 223, anyone convicted of vandalism in connection with places of worship or sacred texts can be sentenced to jail for between six months and two years.¹⁴

The personal status of Muslim citizens is regulated by the country’s interpretation of Shari’a law. Male Muslim citizens can marry non-Muslim women. But female Muslim citizens cannot marry non-Muslim men. Jews have rabbinical courts that oversee their personal status affairs such as marriage or inheritance. But Christians do not have a legal status that guarantees their rights as a minority.¹⁵ Furthermore, no Church is allowed to admit Moroccans who have converted to Christianity.

The breaking of the Ramadan fast in public is a crime punished under the Penal Code with six months in prison and a fine of up to 500 dirhams.¹⁶

The Moroccan government is also reported to be developing security initiatives aimed at stopping extremist groups from radicalising people.¹⁷ Mbarka Bouaida, Morocco’s deputy foreign minister, said: “This idea of having a specific strategy within the religious sphere is really to preserve the Moroccan population from any extremism or terrorism messages, and it’s helped a lot. It’s helped to conserve our moderate Islam. It’s helped also to succeed somehow in the deradicalization process.” He added: “It’s helping us to understand this new phenomenon, and maybe to find long-term solutions.”

The government’s approach is to view Sunni Islam as civil service as well as a belief system. Under the new security measures, all Friday sermons are now monitored by the government. Additional steps taken include: all imams are screened and required to pass a certification course before conducting Friday prayers; all mosques will now have to meet specific security standards and are vetted as public buildings; government-enforced standards now apply to religious education and women are entitled to become “mouchidas” or secondary leaders within Muslim communities.

Incidents

Both government and society act to restrict religious freedom for citizens. But there have also been some encouraging signs.

Wishing to be granted more recognition and to be able to lead a public religious life, a group of Moroccan converts to Christianity have recently united to form the National Coalition of Moroccan Christians (NCCM). In April 2017 they approached the National Council of Human Rights¹⁸ calling for an end to persecution against them. Reports note that some Christians in Morocco are starting to demand their rights and speak out against the discrimination to which they are subjected.¹⁹

Their main demands are to obtain the right to pray in churches, to marry according to their religion, to give their children Christian names and to be buried in Christian cemeteries. NCCM spokesman Mustafa Susi said: "The group also asked for the right to decide if they want their children to take Islamic religion class in school."²⁰ Although in general the situation is improving, it is still problematic to publicly celebrate a Christian festival, establish a Christian prayer group, or even pray publicly.

Moroccan Christians generally agree that arrests have almost stopped. A Christian convert who is now a Protestant cleric noted that "harassment has become scarce".²¹ But social and sometimes security pressures still exist: religious texts have been confiscated. Very few converts speak out because they fear being harassed in the streets, verbally abused and – on rare occasions – physically assaulted.²²

The general trend observed by academics, researchers, human rights activists, preachers and representatives of religious minorities is that there is progress towards religious freedom. The evidence, however, suggests that the progress is slow and fraught with setbacks. One example of this is the mid-November 2017 meeting between representatives of Morocco's religious minorities including the Moroccan Commission of Religious Minorities and civil society actors.²³ Although the meeting was seen as an important step forward, one of the organisers deplored that there had to be a change of venue and that "some speakers also withdrew after 'pressure'" was exerted. Also, media sources described participants as "'atheists' and 'homosexuals'".²⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

Despite indications that religious freedom in the country is gaining ground, commentators question whether the government's drive against jihadism runs counter to social changes in the country. With an evident shift in society towards Islamic conservatism, experts such as Moroccan political scientist Abdeslam Maghraoui say that "the general direction of the country does not jibe with the idea that Morocco is making an effort to root out extremist ideologies". He adds: "Morocco is definitely getting more conservative and the government doesn't know how to handle it. Or worse, it could even be manipulated to this trend for its own political purposes."²⁵

More recently, the King has proposed education reform in order to fight extremist ideas. He has urged the commission he has appointed to revise schoolbooks and remove problematic content. The Minister of Education, Rachid Benmokhtar, said the schoolbooks were being subjected to a “cleansing operation”. Of the 390 books reviewed, there were 400 comments made concerning 147 texts. The textbook editors were told they could not republish the books without making the required changes regarding what the minister described as “discriminatory content towards gender and race groups as well as towards disabled people and rural citizens”.²⁶

Regarding the question of converts, and of freedom of religion and belief in general, Morocco is facing a dilemma. On the one hand, the country wants to remain strict on religious matters in accordance with the Maliki school of Islamic jurisprudence, to avoid displeasing especially the more conservative part of society. On the other hand, it wants to project a certain image of openness towards Western countries.²⁷

Although there are some encouraging signs, Christians are still denied official recognition. Obtaining the latter would be an important step in terms of improving their legal, security and social status.

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MOZAMBIQUE

RELIGION



- Christians: 53,2%
- Ethnoreligionists: 28,7%
- Muslims: 17,5%
- Others: 0,6%



AREA	POPULATION
799.380km ²	28.751.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Freedom of religion is enshrined in Mozambique's constitution and laws.¹ Mozambique considers itself a secular state.² The constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds and guarantees freedom of religious expression. Article 54 states: "All citizens shall have the freedom to practise or not to practise a religion. [. . .] Religious denominations shall have the right to pursue their religious aims freely and to own and acquire assets for realising their objectives."³ With a few minor exceptions, these principles have been respected by every government since the civil war ended in 1990. Until then, freedom of religion was, at best, tolerated under the then ruling Marxist-Leninist regime. At present, religious organisations, such as Church organisations doing social or development work, must register with the Ministry of Justice.

Religious organisations are permitted to own and run schools. Religious instruction in state-run schools is prohibited.⁴

An agreement between the Republic of Mozambique and the Vatican in 2012 governs the relationship between the state and the Catholic Church.⁵ The agreement states that the Church is legally independent and has the right to organise its internal affairs and appoint staff and other workers.⁶

In Mozambique, the south and the cities are predominantly Christian. The north and coastline areas are home to many (mostly Sunni) Muslims. But traditional African faiths are strongly represented as well, particularly in rural regions. Religious life in Mozambique is diverse and very dynamic⁷ and hence the country is considered a magnet for evangelical missionaries, for example the Brazilian Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God).⁸ Because of their shared language, there are other, comparable Brazilian movements engaged in missionary work in the country.

As regards the Muslim community, young Islamic preachers study mainly in countries such as Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and South Africa before returning to Mozambique with a very strict interpretation of Islam.⁹ As with other countries in East Africa, intolerant Islamist ideologies may take root in Mozambique.

The Churches, especially the Catholic Church, was involved in the peace process between the former military opposition RENAMO and FRELIMO, the party which has shifted from Marxism towards social-democracy and which has held power without interruption since independence in 1975. Thanks to this involvement, the Church has gained in influence in Mozambique.

The country's political situation is by no means trouble-free. In July 2013, Archbishop Emeritus Jaime Gonçalves, a central figure during the peace negotiations, complained that former RENAMO fighters had still not been integrated into the police force as provided for by the peace agreements concluded in Rome.

A sign of the Catholic Church's importance for the country's social stability and development came when RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama insisted that the Church act as a mediator in negotiations with the FRELIMO government.¹⁰

Incidents

The 2014 elections led to an increase in political tensions in Mozambique and this continued through the reporting period. Church leaders have often criticised corruption, power monopolies and separatist trends.¹¹

In February 2016, a pastor of the Apostolic Faith Mission was shot by unknown attackers during a church service in Chimoio city. His widow said the motive for the murder may have been connected with tensions with other Churches.¹²

While Mozambican Muslims are regarded as moderate, radical preachers have been gaining followers for several years. Concerns over further violence have been growing since an attack on a police station in northern Mozambique in October 2017.¹³ Four men attacked the police station in the port city of Mocimboa da Praia; one of the men brandished a bush knife from under his kaftan and thrust it into the face of the police officer in charge. The other attackers seized a total of 37 Kalashnikovs.

The perpetrators are thought to have been young men who had joined up with radical preachers at a mosque still under construction in the city's Nanduadue District.¹⁴ The imams, some of whom had come from neighbouring Tanzania, are thought to have given sermons referring to local mayors and administrative and police officials as "unbelievers". Police said 52 suspects were arrested, all of them Mozambicans. They all reportedly refused to make statements about their motives and who was backing their movement.

Negotiations are ongoing between the Church and the authorities over the return of Church property seized after Mozambique gained independence. About 60 percent of the assets have already been returned and discussions continue about the rest of them.¹⁵

Notwithstanding these problems, there were no reports of serious religious freedom violations during the reporting period.¹⁶ The likely reason for this is that Mozambique's religious communities have traditionally been tolerant towards one another.

Prospects for freedom of religion

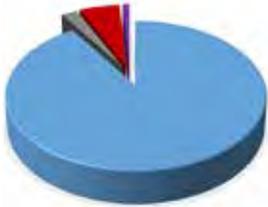
Given the Catholic Church's commitment to human rights, its recent constructive role in the country's peace process and its strong standing in society auger well for the protection of religious freedom. However, the growth of Islamism, imported not least by preachers studying abroad, suggests that religious intolerance may become an increasing problem in Mozambique as it is in many other parts of East Africa.

Endnotes

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NAMIBIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 90,9%
- Agnostics: 2,3%
- Ethnoreligionists: 5,8%
- Others: 1%



AREA	POPULATION
824.116 km ²	2.514.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Before and during Germany's colonisation of the former South West Africa, extensive missionary activity was conducted, mainly by Protestant missionaries.¹ This heritage is clearly visible to this day given the high numbers of Christians in the country. Christianity continues to shape religious life in Namibia – even though it has been criticised for the part it played in colonial times.²

Many believers combine elements of Christian belief and practice with traditional African rites and customs. Article 10 of the Namibian constitution guarantees freedom of religion and protects citizens from religious discrimination.³ Article 21 lays down the "freedom to practise any religion", while Article 19 refers more broadly to culture: "Every person shall be entitled to enjoy, practise, profess, maintain and promote any culture, language, tradition or religion subject to the terms of this constitution."

Namibia is a secular state in which no religious community receives preferential treatment.⁴ This model of Church-state relations, which is based on the constitution, is reflected in Namibian government policy. The state places no restrictions on the establishment of religious communities. Official recognition through registration is possible but not mandatory. Religious organisations generating income through projects must register as charitable associations with the Ministry of Trade and Industry.⁵ The Council of Churches in Namibia and the Association of Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches in Namibia are influential.⁶ The Catholic Church of Namibia is widely recognised as a main religious denomination and a moral authority.

Incidents

During the period under review, some religious communities complained of difficulties in obtaining visas for foreign employees to do religious work but the same requirements apply to secular employment permits.⁷

During the Catholic Bishops of Namibia and Lesotho's ad limina visit to the Vatican in April 2015, Archbishop Nashenda Liborius Ndumbukuti of Windhoek, Chairman of the Namibian

Bishops' Conference, stated: "[W]e have good relations with state authorities, pursuant to an agreement of understanding, to the point that we have designated a person to liaise between the Episcopal Conference and the government. We cooperate but we remain an independent voice from the authorities. The government still appreciates our efforts and provides subsidies to our schools and hospitals."⁸

During the reporting period, there were no serious reports of religious freedom violations in Namibia.⁹ A dispute took place between the authorities and local Muslims concerning the religious activities of nine Muslims who had entered from South Africa and who were deported by the government.¹⁰

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

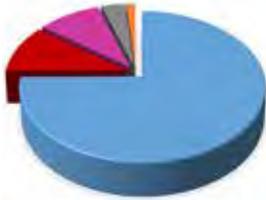
The concept of a nation characterised by ethnic, cultural and religious diversity is manifested in a particularly positive way in Namibia and hence religious freedom is not expected to deteriorate.

Endnotes

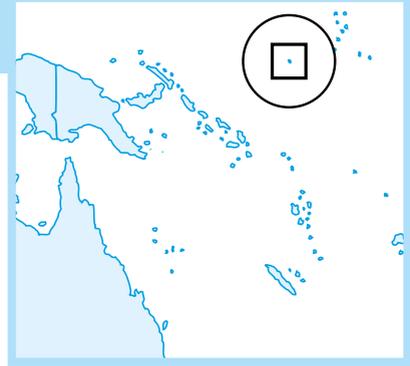
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NAURU

RELIGION



- Christians: 74,9%
- Chinese Folk Religionists: 10,5%
- Baha'is: 9,6%
- Agnostics: 3,6%
- Buddhists: 1,4%



AREA

21.3km²

POPULATION

10.300

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The country is an island in the South Pacific to the south of the Marshall Islands with a population of around 10,300. It is the world's smallest republic.

The preamble of the constitution acknowledges "God as the almighty and everlasting Lord and the giver of all good things".¹ Under the constitution, a person has the right "either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest and propagate his religion or beliefs in worship, teaching, practice and observance". A person also has the right to change religion or belief. These rights may be restricted by law when it is "reasonably required in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health" or when it is necessary to allow someone to practice his or her religion without 'the unsolicited intervention of members of some other religion'.

Under the constitution school children are not required to attend religious education or services if they relate to a religion other than their own. There is no requirement that public schools offer religious instruction. Some churches run private schools or provide religious education within public schools.

According to the CIA Factbook, more than half of the Protestants in Nauru are members of the Congregational Church (35.7 percent), and Catholics make up 33 percent of the population.² More than 10 percent follow Chinese folk religions. Since the opening of an immigration detention centre on the island there have also been a few hundred Muslims.

In order to officiate at marriages, proselytise, construct religious buildings or hold public services, religious groups are required to register with the state. In order to register, such groups must have at least 750 members. At present, the Catholic Church, the Congregational Church, the Assemblies of God and the Nauru Independent Church are registered. There are no reports that the process of registration is biased against certain groups. Smaller religious groups have reported that, although they do not have enough members to register, registration is only strictly required in order to officiate at state-recognised marriages.

There was controversy in Nauru when the authorities allowed Australia to set up an immigration detention centre in the country. There have been serious allegations of mistreatment of detainees have been made in connection with the centre. It has also been alleged that Nauru's authorities have effectively denied media visas in order to hinder reporting of the situation.³ There is no evidence of restrictions on freedom of religion at the centre. It is acknowledged by independent observers that the government generally respects freedom of religion.⁴ In 2008, the government lifted restrictions on the missionary activities of Jehovah's witnesses, whose members had previously been denied entry visas.⁵ Representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints reported no restrictions on entry to the country by missionaries.⁶ Missionaries from several Christian groups report they can operate freely.

Incidents

There have been no recent reports of government or societal discrimination against individuals or groups on account of their religion.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

There is nothing to indicate that the protection of religious freedom in Nauru is likely to change or deteriorate in the foreseeable future.

Endnotes

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NEPAL

RELIGION



● Hindus: 66,4%
● Ethnoreligionists: 13,1%
● Buddhists: 1,2%
● Muslims: 4,1%
● Christians: 3,9%
● Others: 0,5%



AREA	POPULATION
147.181 km ²	28.851.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

With an overwhelming majority of 507 votes out of 601, on 16th September 2015 the constituent assembly of Nepal approved a new constitution for Nepal. The new constitutional text asserts the secular nature or character of Nepalese institutions. It also severely restricts religious liberty including the freedom to change religion.¹

In article four, paragraph one, the new constitution stipulates: "Nepal is an independent, indivisible, sovereign and secular state."² It continues: "For the purpose of this article, the term 'secular' means the protection of religion and culture being practised since ancient times as well as religious and cultural freedom."

State secularism was adopted in this former Hindu kingdom in 2007, a year after the abolition of the monarchy and the end of a decade of civil war between government armed forces and Maoist guerrillas. Since then, however, there has been uncertainty as to the form that future Nepalese institutions would take. The pressure exerted by the pro-Hindu parties was strong and added to the countless issues, which made an agreement between the members of the constituent assembly impossible to ratify. It was only after the earthquake of 25th April 2015 that, pressured by the people, the main Parliamentary political parties reached an agreement in August 2015. It is this agreement that has helped free Nepal from the paralysis which has gripped the country for almost 10 years. In the days before 16th September 2015, parliamentarians had voted on the different articles of the future constitution one by one. They rejected by more than two-thirds an amendment submitted by a Hindu party which wanted Nepal to be declared a "Hindu state".

The rejection of this amendment was welcomed by the leaders of the Catholic Church in Nepal who head a community of barely 8,000 faithful. Father Silas Bogati, vicar general of the Apostolic Vicariate of Nepal, said: "Secularism is not just a religious issue. It is a value that induces religious freedom and equality of treatment between all religions." He added that the vote by the constituent assembly of Nepal implied that the state does not promote one religion at the expense of another.³

For Samim Ansari, coordinator of the National Muslim Struggle Alliance, this vote symbolised the culmination of a long struggle of religious minorities to be treated on an equal footing

with the overwhelming Hindu majority of the population. In a country where Muslims, according to the 2011 census, represent 4.4 percent of the population, the Muslim leader considered that “every citizen has the right to see his religious freedom guaranteed”⁴.

Comments from the Hindu parties were very different. The amendment rejected on 14th September 2015 was presented by the Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal, the fourth largest political party represented within the constituent assembly of Nepal. On the day of the vote, Hindu activists demonstrated in front of the Parliament to put pressure on the Members of Parliament. At the end of the vote, Madhav Bhattarai, President for Nepal of the Indian Hindu organisation Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (Committee for the Hindu Revival), declared that the MPs’ vote “hurt the feelings [of the Hindu majority of the Nepalese population]”. “Nepal has missed the opportunity to become the only Hindu state on the planet. It is a decision contrary to our identity,”⁵ added the Hindu official.

All the debates were conducted in an atmosphere of tension and violence.⁶ In the weeks leading up to the vote, clashes between security forces and protesters opposed to the new constitution resulted to more than 40 fatalities. Among those who felt aggrieved were the Madhesis ethnic minority, who feel they were not sufficiently represented by politicians debating the constitution.

Although those responsible for religious minorities have welcomed the assertion that the state should be secular, they are worried about certain legislative provisions within the new constitution. The law stipulates that the state safeguard the “Sanatana Dharma”, a term often translated by “Primordial Tradition” and which designates the essence of Hinduism. Article nine, paragraph three of the constitution, which deals with the national anthem, affirms that the national animal is the cow, an animal that Hinduism regards as sacred.

Article 26 of the constitution was described as “dangerous” by Father Silas Bogati in July 2015. Paragraph one declares religious freedom to be a fundamental right. Paragraph two authorises religions to organise worship without hindrance. Paragraph three states: “...no person shall... convert a person of one religion to another religion, or disturb the religion of other people. Such an act shall be punishable by law.”

In stating this, Nepalese politicians claimed that the constitution gave legitimacy to nationalist groups advocating the return of the Hindu monarchy.⁷ Narayan Kaji Shrestha is vice-president of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal, the Maoist party that emerged defeated from the November 2013 elections. However, with 82 MPs, it remained the third-largest political party within the constituent assembly of Nepal. According to the latter, “the form of secularism on which the main political parties have agreed upon is a pure negation of the secularism that we have been advocating for.”⁸

Recent events have given people reason to be worried that the secular nature of the state is on a shaky foundation. More than 160 years after the “Muuki Ain” penal code came into force, Parliament passed a new one on 8th August 2017, referencing key sections of Nepal’s new constitution. The new code criminalises “offending the religious feelings” of others. The penalty can be up to two years in prison and a fine of 2,000 rupees. Article 9.158 of the penal code prohibits attempts to “convert” others or “to weaken the religion, faith or

beliefs practised since ancient times ('sanatan') by a community, caste or ethnic group", and up to five years in prison and a fine of 50,000 rupees (just under \$500).⁹ Signed by Bidhya Devi Bhandari, the President of Nepal, the law came into force on 16th October 2017.

Back in 2015, Deputy Prime Minister Kamal Thapa had offered assurances that the proposed changes to the Penal Code in no way contravened religious freedom. In February 2016 Parliament held a public consultation on the proposed penal code revisions. According to Nepalese Christian officials, more than 45,000 comments were submitted in writing but they claimed the opinions were not taken into account. Buddhist and Muslim organisations as well associations from the Himalayan minority of Kirats have also expressed their fears, but again these have allegedly not been taken into consideration.¹⁰

Pastor Tanka Subedi warned against the ideas of certain Hindu leaders for whom secularism is nothing but a Trojan horse introduced by Christians in Nepal to subvert the fundamentally Hindu character of institutions within the country.¹¹

There are other laws and regulations in addition to the constitution and the penal code which discriminate against non-Hindus. Laws currently in place mean that it is much easier to obtain legal recognition for Hindu organisations than institutions of other faiths. Non-Hindu organisations experience difficulties in acquiring, for example, property for use in an institutional capacity. Marriages involving couples of different religions are also difficult, mainly for cultural or social reasons. Christians face recurring problems trying to obtain land either to turn into cemeteries or for use to enlarge existing ones.

Although not strictly relevant to the topic under consideration, the Nepal earthquake of 25th April 2015 was of such significance that its impact would inevitably have repercussions with regard to human rights including religious liberty, as will be seen in the 'Incidents' section. The earthquake struck near the centre of Kathmandu and killed as many as 9,000 people and damaged or destroyed 600,000 buildings.¹²

Incidents

After the vote on the new constitution, the most serious incident regarding religious freedom occurred on 9th June 2016. Seven men and one woman were arrested for distributing a booklet about Jesus Christ in a Christian school, the majority of whose students were from other religious groups. The people distributing the booklet came to the school as part of a programme of assistance to Nepal following the earthquake in 2015. The booklet distributors were Christian and the police accused them of trying to convert the children. The Christian aid workers denied the accusations, saying that their only aim had been to help the children. These arrests have sparked an emotive response in Nepal. Just days before the arrest, the Kathmandu authorities had announced that all Christian institutions hosting orphans and children would be heavily fined or even closed if Christian books were discovered among their textbooks. Nevertheless, when the eight arrested Christians were put on trial in early December 2016, the court acquitted them and all charges against them were dropped.¹³

Another incident related to the Catholic Church. On 18th April 2017, an arson attack partially damaged the presbytery of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Cathedral in Kathmandu. The damage was not as serious as many had feared but the fire could have been deadly. The police opened an investigation. The arson attack occurred a few weeks before the local elections of 14th May and 14th June, an important step before the January 2018 parliamentary elections. Father Silas Bogati, former parish priest of the cathedral, stated: “We are very worried. Since nothing has been left [to identify the arsonists], we do not know whether this is a personal attack or an action undertaken by an organisation with political aims.”¹⁴

The government of Nepal announced on 4th April 2016 that Christmas was no longer a public holiday. Explaining this development, Shakti Basnet, Minister of Home Affairs, said: “We were forced to make this decision in order to control the [increase in] the number of non-working days. This measure is in no way directed against Christians.”¹⁵ Christmas had been added as a public holiday in 2008. The move came after the abolition of Nepal’s monarchy, the only Hindu one in the world, which had been in existence for 240 years. The monarchy was replaced by a secular state.¹⁶

Christians have argued that the country had 83 non-working days or public holidays related to the Hindu religious calendar and that one more day for the celebration of Christmas did not make much of a difference. Nonetheless, the government stuck to its decision, stating that Christmas would remain a day off for Christian employees employed in public service.

The National Federation of Christians in Nepal stated: “The government aims at restricting the rights and religious freedom of minorities.”¹⁷ In addition, Christians argued that, instead of abolishing Christmas as a public holiday, the authorities should prioritise rebuilding the country after the earthquake of April 2015.

Four churches were attacked within the course of five days during May 2018. Nobody was hurt. No one has claimed responsibility. Three of the churches were victims to arson attacks – Hebron Church, Hilihang Rural Municipality, Panchtar (9th May), Emmanuel Church, Doti (10th May) and Emmanuel Church, Kanchanpur (11th May). Mahima Church, Dhangadhi, was bombed on 13th May, and was partially destroyed.¹⁸ Although police said the Biplab Maoists were to blame, local sources highlight the significance of threats made over the previous weeks by a Hindu extremist group. It came after six Christians were placed under police custody in Tehrathrum district, eastern Nepal, under charges of evangelising. Two of them were arrested on 9th May after singing worship songs in the street and the other four were arrested at home.¹⁹

Prospects for freedom of religion

A Himalayan nation squeezed between the two giants that are India and China, Nepal is experiencing a time of change at a fundamental level. A mosaic of 125 ethnic groups, Nepal has chosen a republican and federal structure, and yet the seven provinces are

far from being stabilised. Against this shifting backdrop, the tensions fuelled by Hindu groups are an additional factor of instability. Religious minorities will no doubt watch carefully to see how the new penal code is applied and whether religious freedom will be upheld in their country.

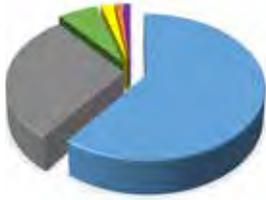
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NETHERLANDS

RELIGION



- Christians: 60,1%
- Agnostics: 29%
- Muslims: 6,5%
- Atheists: 2%
- Buddhists: 1,2%
- Others: 1,2%



AREA	POPULATION
41.542 km ²	16.980.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands protects freedom of religion. Article 6 provides: "Everyone shall have the right to profess freely his religion or belief, either individually or in community with others, without prejudice to his responsibility under the law."¹ The government may restrict the exercise of this right "for the protection of health, in the interest of traffic and to combat or prevent disorders"²

All citizens are to be treated equally and discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief is prohibited by the constitution.³ Discrimination complaints may be made to a national government helpline as well as the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights. Complaints about online discrimination can be made to the internet discrimination hotline (MiND Nederland).⁴ Local governments also establish antidiscrimination boards to register complaints.⁵

The Dutch Criminal Code makes it a crime to make or distribute public intentional insults on the basis of religion, as well as to engage in verbal, written, or illustrated incitement to religious hatred.⁶

There is no legal requirement for religious groups to register with the government, but to receive tax-exempt status religious groups must be "of a philosophical or religious nature", contribute to the general welfare of society and be non-profit and nonviolent.⁷ The government requires all clerics, including imams and pastors, from outside the EEA, Switzerland or Turkey to learn Dutch as part of the compulsory integration process.⁸

The law permits employees to be exempted from working on certain days for religious reasons, but employers may deny employees such an exception, depending on the nature of the work, such as employment in the health sector.⁹

Education provided by public authorities must pay "due respect to everyone's religion or belief"¹⁰ and the government provides funding to religious schools and institutions.¹¹ Religious schools are regulated by law, with regard given to the freedom to educate according to their religions or ideologies. These schools may be inspected to ensure the religious education does not incite criminal offenses.¹²

In March 2018, a Dutch animal welfare party proposed a ban on all slaughter of animals without stunning. In 2012, the law made a religious exception to a similar ban for the production of meat and in 2017 Jewish and Muslim leaders signed a contract with the government to regulate slaughter without stunning.¹³

The parliament approved a ban on face-covering clothing, including burqas and niqabs, in public places such as government buildings, schools, hospitals, and on public transport in November 2016.¹⁴ As of the end of March 2018 the law had not been passed by the senate, as it waited for the Home Ministry to answer questions that had been raised about the law in July 2017.¹⁵

Parliamentary elections were held in March 2017, with the Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid) (PVV) coming in second with 20 seats.¹⁶ Party leader Geert Wilders had called for the “de-Islamisation” of the country including prohibiting headscarves in public, closing all mosques and Islamic schools, banning the Qur’an, and stopping any asylum seekers or immigrants from “Islamic countries”.¹⁷

In December 2016 a court found Geert Wilders guilty of inciting discrimination against a racial group for comments he made about Moroccans at a rally in 2014 but imposed no punishment. The court cleared him of the charge of inciting hatred.¹⁸

The Forum for Democracy (FvD), formed just six months before the March election and opposed to “mass migration” and public face coverings and supporting a so-called “Dutch Values Protection Act”, won 1.8 percent of the vote. As of February 2018, FvD polled at 10 per cent of the vote.¹⁹

In May 2017 a court ruled that the municipality of Utrecht was justified in lowering a Muslim woman’s welfare benefit in 2013 when she refused to remove her niqab during work training due to the reduced chances of finding work while wearing it. The court held that the infringement on religious freedom (a ban on wearing a niqab during work training) was “necessary in the interests of the protection of the rights and freedom of others”.²⁰

The government launched an anti-discrimination campaign in September 2016 and signed agreements with social media platforms to counter discrimination.²¹

The government provided security to both mosques and Jewish institutions. An organisation called “Security Pact against Discrimination”, consisting of Jews, Muslims and Christians, as well as other local citizens initiatives, provided extra security to mosques in the aftermath of an attack on a Quebec mosque in 2017.²²

Incidents

Related to Judaism

Official police figures for 2016 (the most recent available) included 335 hate crimes or incidents motivated by anti-Semitism.²³ In its 2016 report, Centre Information and Documentation Israel (CIDI) indicated a 13 percent decrease in anti-Semitic incidents, with 109 incidents registered, as compared to 126 in 2015.²⁴ In 2017, however, the number of

incidents rose slightly overall, with vandalism incidents increasing to a 10-year high. The government hotline MiND recorded 236 complaints of internet-based anti-Semitism in 2017.²⁵

In its annual report on racism, anti-Semitism, and extreme violence in the Netherlands, the Verwey-Jonker Institute - Anne Frank Foundation also reported a decrease in anti-Semitic incidents in 2016 (the most recent year available) with 35 incidents, compared to 57 in 2015. The number of incidents of anti-Semitic name-calling or insults increased from 424 in 2015 to 761 in 2016.²⁶

CIDI reported that in September 2016, two men assaulted a Jewish man on the street after addressing him with an anti-Semitic slur. A couple, visibly identifiable as Jewish, was assaulted and seriously injured in October 2016.²⁷ In 2017, CIDI registered four physical assaults including an attack on two Israeli orthodox tourists.

Attacks against property included swastika graffiti on a synagogue and in a cemetery and "stolpersteine" commemorating Holocaust victims were stolen.²⁸ In August 2016, anti-Semitic threats including "ISIS" and "Kill all Jews" were spray-painted on a school building and twenty houses in Voorburg.²⁹ A man waving a Palestinian flag smashed the windows of a kosher restaurant one day after US President Donald Trump recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December 2017.³⁰

Related to Islam

Official police figures for 2016 (the most recent available) reported 352 hate crimes or incidents motivated by bias against Muslims and civil society organisations reported 73 incidents.³¹

The Verwey-Jonker Institute - Anne Frank Foundation report noted a decrease in anti-Muslim incidents in 2016 (the most recent available), with 364 incidents compared to 466 in 2015. One explanation for the higher number in 2015 was the social tensions relating to terrorist attacks in Europe and the large influx of refugees.³²

Of the incidents reported in 2016, 16 were physical assaults. Examples included a woman wearing a headscarf being chased down the road, insulted, and beaten.³³ Turkish Forum Netherlands reported that a group assaulted two people and vandalised a mosque as worshippers broke their fast during Ramadan in June 2016 and a woman wearing a face veil was severely beaten in a train station in October 2016.³⁴

Destruction of property included vandalism on a mosque reading "Kill all Muslims". After the July 2016 terrorist attack in Nice, France, the windows of a mosque were smashed and a Muslim woman's car was destroyed. Pigs were used to threaten and insult Muslims, including a pig's head and feet being thrown into the garden of a Muslim family and pork being left at mosques or other Muslim buildings.³⁵

In January 2018 far-right extremists targeted a mosque in Amsterdam by placing a decapitated doll with its head hanging on a fence above the body. A note opposing the construction of a 'mega-mosque' was left at the scene.³⁶

Related to Christianity

In December 2016 a church in Utrecht was vandalized, resulting in thousands of euros in damage³⁷ and in January 2017 a church in Amersfoort was the victim of arson twice in a week.³⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

It appears that there were no significant new or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period under review. If certain anti-migrant political parties continue to gain popularity, however, there may be an increased risk of legislative proposals leading to increased restrictions on religious freedom for minority religions, particularly for Muslims. Additionally, there is an increased risk of societal intolerance against minority religions, some of which may be a backlash to global terrorism or geopolitical conflicts attributed to certain religious groups, as well as anti-immigration sentiment in the Netherlands.

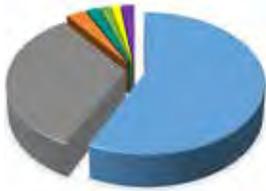
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NEW ZEALAND

RELIGION



- Christians: 57%
- Agnostics: 32,9%
- Buddhists: 3%
- Hindus: 2%
- Muslims: 1,6%
- Atheists: 1,4%
- Others: 2,1%



AREA	POPULATION
268.107 km ²	4.565.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

According to the New Zealand Bill of Rights, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief, including the right to adopt and to hold opinions without interference”.¹ Religious expression is unrestricted: “Every person has the right to manifest that person’s religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, or teaching, either individually or in community with others, and either in public or in private”,² provided that religious practices do not breach the peace.³

New Zealand law states that the curriculum in state primary schools “shall be entirely of a secular character”.⁴ However, under certain circumstances, religious instruction may take place within primary and secondary schools.⁵ Attendance for this instruction is not compulsory.

Discrimination on the basis of religion or lack of religious belief is prohibited.⁶ Complaints of unlawful discrimination may be filed with the government-funded Human Rights Commission (HRC). Conduct prohibited by the Human Rights Act may also be prosecuted under other laws.⁷

The HRC continues to implement its 2007 Statement on Religious Diversity, which “emphasises that the state seeks to treat all faith communities and those who profess no religion equally before the law, and that New Zealand has no official or established religion. It encourages education about our diverse religious and spiritual traditions, respectful dialogue, and positive relationships between government and faith communities”.⁸ In its Annual Report for the period ending 30th June 2017, the HRC reported 69 enquiries and complaints on the grounds of religious belief.⁹

Incidents

In November 2016, an Indian Christian’s application for asylum was rejected despite his claim that he faced death threats from Hindu extremists in India. The man’s lawyer said that the threats to his client’s life were due to his efforts to convert Indians to Christianity

but the High Court ruled that, although the situation for Christians in India had “deteriorated”, the risk was low if he went back.¹⁰

In November 2016, an Auckland imam was publicly criticised by government officials after making anti-Semitic comments in his speeches, including referring to the Jewish community as “the enemy of Muslims”. The President of the Federation of Islamic Association New Zealand (FIANZ) said the imam’s views were incorrect and that he had made a mistake.¹¹

An Australian anti-Semitic blogger was detained in New Zealand in October 2017 when he arrived in Auckland after his entry permission was revoked on “character grounds”. He had previously been jailed for three years in Australia after a verbal racist attack targeting two Jewish men.¹²

In July 2016 a Muslim woman was told by a jewellery store manager not to bother applying for a job at the shop if she refused to remove her hijab. After she complained of discrimination, the company apologised and offered the woman an interview. This was reportedly the second instance of discrimination against women wearing a hijab in nine months.¹³

In September 2016, the Whanganui branch of the Right Wing Resistance distributed anti-Muslim pamphlets in mailboxes around the region. The pamphlets claimed that Muslims came to New Zealand pretending to be refugees but were actually intent on changing the “laws, culture and daily life to suit Muslims”, and that “their main goal was to ‘kill anyone’ who doesn’t believe in their God (Allah)”.¹⁴ The president of the Multicultural Council of Rangitikei/Whanganui condemned the pamphlets.

Prospects for freedom of religion

It appears that there were no significant new or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period under review. However, there appears to be an increased risk of societal intolerance against minority religions fuelled by anti-immigration sentiments in New Zealand.

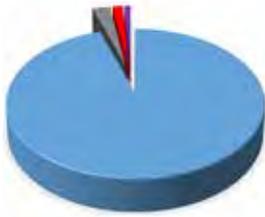
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NICARAGUA

RELIGION



- Christians: 95%
- Agnostics: 2,6%
- Spiritists: 1,5%
- Others: 0,9%



AREA	POPULATION
130.374km ²	6.150.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the constitution¹ states that it emanates from the Nicaraguan people and in the name, among others, of Christians who, based on their belief in God, have committed themselves to fight for the oppressed.

Article four declares that the state is tasked with promoting human development inspired by Christian values.

As regards Nicaragua's foreign policy: "All forms of political, military, economic, cultural, or religious aggression and the interference in the internal affairs of other states are forbidden and proscribed."

The nation's principles include recognition of indigenous peoples and those of African descent and respect human dignity and for Christian values.

According to article 14, the state has no official religion.

All people are equal before the law, according to article 27, and the state does not discriminate, among other things, on religious grounds.

Article 29 states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience and thought and to profess or not profess a religion. No one shall be the object of coercive measures which diminish these rights or be compelled to declare his/her creed, ideology or beliefs."

Among various social groups, male and female religious have, according to article 49, the right to establish organisations in order to fulfil their aspirations.

"All persons, either individually or in a group, have the right to manifest their religious beliefs in public or private, through worship, practices and teachings." Article 69 states that no one can fail to respect the law by invoking religious beliefs or dispositions.

Education is secular but article 124 recognises the right of private religious schools to teach religion as an extracurricular subject.

Article 134 states that members of the clergy cannot run for president, vice-president or parliament unless they resign their ministry at least twelve months before the election.

Minority communities on the Caribbean coast are guaranteed a high level of autonomy to develop according to their historical and cultural traditions. The preservation of their cultures, languages, religions and customs is also guaranteed in article 180.

Incidents

In August 2016, the government, led by Daniel Ortega, adopted a measure restricting access to the country by religious and cultural groups. "Any cultural mission, Christian group, pastor or other religious who want to enter Nicaragua, must be reported in advance to the immigration authorities. In addition to providing comprehensive information about their visit to the country, they will have to wait to see if they are allowed to enter the territory." As a result of this, Catholic and Evangelical pilgrims were not allowed into the country.²

That same month, the Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights filed a complaint with the Minister of the Interior because 41 Franciscan friars from El Salvador were barred from entering the country. The delegation, consisting mostly of older adults, had to stay overnight in the open air on the pretext that under "higher orders, no one coming for religious purposes is allowed to enter the country"³

In December 2016, Nicaragua's Catholic bishops met with Luis Almagro, the Secretary General of the Organisation of American States.⁴ The bishops expressed concerns about the country's socio-political situation.⁵ Monsignor José Silvino Báez said concerns were expressed at the meeting about the deterioration of the country's institutions and democracy.⁶

In February 2017, a young woman, Vilma Trujillo García, died from burns after being thrown into a fire in an effort to drive "demons from her". A group led by Juan Gregorio Rocha, pastor of the Celestial Vision sect, had reportedly ordered the fire to be lit and had thrown her into it to expel "demons from her". Evangelical pastor Saturnino Cerrato and Monsignor Silvio Fonseca condemned fanaticism and religious extremism.⁷ The monsignor said followers of such groups should know that their leaders cannot manipulate them and that the state cannot allow life to be taken in the name of religion. This is the second case of religious fanaticism in less than two years.⁸

The government responded in May 2017 by submitting a draft bill to reform the criminal code by adding an article on aggravated murder that would include a penalty for murder committed as a result of group rituals, beliefs or religious fanaticism.⁹

In December 2017, the Catholic Church rejected a government bill to add Marian festivities to the nation's historical and cultural heritage, including the day in honour of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, because it would reduce "... the dogma of faith towards the Virgin Mary to the state of popular folklore."¹⁰ Eventually, the government gave up on the project.¹¹

In March 2018, the results of a survey by the CCK Central America agency conducted between April and June 2017 on "Who do Central Americans Believe?" were made public. The study found that in the case of Nicaragua, the level of credibility of the Church as the

most trusted institution by Nicaraguans stood at around 17 per cent with two members of the clergy picked as the most trusted public figures.¹²

Following the violent repression of demonstrations against the government in May 2018, there were reports of mortar attacks against Catholic churches that were being used as emergency dispensaries, as well as harassment against the medics who were caring for the injured inside¹³.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Unlike during the previous period, tensions have risen between the government and the Catholic Church. Acts of overt discrimination have occurred, including the measure to restrict access to the country by religious and missionary groups. The violence of May 2018 is another sign of the social tension growing, and of where the churches were playing a mediating and conciliation role, with mixed success. Therefore, the state of freedom of religion has perceptibly deteriorated and the outlook for the future is negative.

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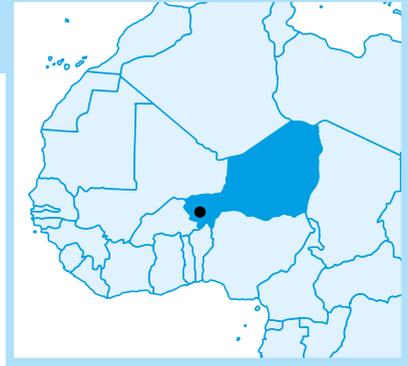
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NIGER

RELIGION



- Muslims: 95,7%
- Ethnoreligionists: 3,9%
- Others: 0,4%



AREA	POPULATION
1.267.000 km ²	20.715.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution of the “Seventh Republic”, dated 25th November 2010,¹ guarantees, among other things, separation of powers, decentralisation, a multi-party system and general civil and human rights.² According to the constitution, the Republic of Niger is a secular state. The law provides for a clear separation of state and religion. Respect for all faiths is enshrined in article 8 of the constitution which enshrines equality of all people before the law, regardless of religious identity. Article 9 states: “[...] political parties with an ethnic, regionalist or religious character are prohibited. No party may be knowingly created with the purpose of promoting an ethnic group, a region or a religion.”³ Religious communities must register with the authorities.

The country’s president, prime minister and the president of the parliament must take a religious oath when they are installed in office. The oath depends on the individual’s personal religion. Conversion is permitted. Larger public events with the aim of proselytising are prohibited, however, for security reasons.⁴

Muslims represent the vast majority of the country’s population. There are also small Christian religious communities of Catholic and Protestant denominations. Religious instruction in state-run schools is prohibited. Schools with religious sponsors require the approval of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Education.⁵ The Ministry of Religious Affairs in Niger is responsible for inter-religious dialogue.

Incidents

In terms of the threat posed by Islamist jihadism, the situation in Niger stabilised during the period under review. However, because of its central location in West Africa, its size and proximity to the centres of Islamist jihadism in West Africa, the country remains under an acute threat. In recent years, Islamist organisations have used the opportunities granted under the constitution to gain a further foothold in the country.⁶ These include, for example, Wahhabi groups to which the pluralistic principles enshrined in the constitution are utterly foreign. These groups fear a presumptive blurring of religious identity in

Niger through the country's secular, democratic state system. According to media reports, numerous Wahhabist centres have emerged in Niger in recent years.⁷

The small Catholic community in Niger is concentrated in the Archdiocese of Niamey (in the capital) and the Diocese of Maradi. It enjoys an excellent reputation for its social commitment and charitable work. The Catholic Church operates numerous social institutions and schools.⁸

Relations between Muslims and other religious communities in the country have traditionally been good. Muslims and Christians regularly visit one another for major religious celebrations. The interfaith forum of Muslims and Christians is active in all parts of the country and promotes cooperation between religions and religious communities.⁹ Bibles written in Arabic and in the leading local languages are easily available.

According to the relief agency Open Doors, there are three groups of Christians living in Niger that are affected by persecution.¹⁰ These include Christians who are members of traditional churches, Christians of Muslim origin and Christians who belong to Protestant free churches. At times, only Christians of Muslim origins suffer. One form of this is when a Christian is expelled from his or her family and loses his or her inheritance rights. There are cases of kidnapping and forced marriage as well. Sometimes all three groups of Christians are affected when, for instance, rental of housing or business premises is involved.

According to information provided by Open Doors, the persecution of Christians has grown in some parts of the country but has declined in other parts.¹¹ The situation for Christians has improved somewhat in the capital, Niamey. The situation is becoming increasingly difficult for Christians, however, and for businessmen in particular, in areas with strong Islamist influence, such as Diffa. The situation is worsening in the Diffa and Tahoua regions because some areas there have fallen under the control of militant Islamic groups. Christians are reportedly bullied by ordinary citizens in regions such as Zinder. In Maradi, Tahoua, Dosso, Niamey and Tillabery, on the other hand, a government-organised initiative to promote more peaceful cohabitation between Muslims and Christians has reduced the burden of such harassment.

In an interview with Domradio in Cologne, Archbishop Laurent Lompo reported that the Catholic Church in Niger experienced "some difficulties" following publication of the Mohammed cartoons by Charlie Hebdo, during the time prior to the bloody 7th January 2015 attack on the satirical magazine. Churches in Niger were being set on fire at the time. But they have now been rebuilt and are larger than before. Christianity is "advancing step by step and is now at a stable level", the Archbishop said.¹²

On 5th October 2017, an attack was carried out in Niger in which four American soldiers and five soldiers of the army of Niger were killed. The organisation "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb" was most likely responsible for the crime.¹³ The attack occurred as a mixed patrol unit of American and native soldiers made its way to a meeting with chiefs in the south-west of Niger, on the border with Mali. At least 50 heavily armed men in pick-ups and on motorcycles attacked the soldiers. Father Mauro Armanino, an Italian-born Catholic African missionary working in Niger, reported that some regions in Niger were not stable

due to the presence of foreign troops. Various attacks had been carried out, he reported, in a region located some 120km from Niamey. This region along the border with Mali has been unstable for a long time. Another area that is not stable is Lake Chad, where the Islamists of the Islamist-jihadist organisation Boko Haram from Nigeria are active. Also unstable is the region along the border with Libya, where human trafficking occurs.¹⁴

In June 2016, in the Nigrin city of Bosso on the banks of Lake Chad, there was unrest between indigenous soldiers and Islamist jihadists from Nigeria, Niger's neighbour to the south. Boko Haram fighters had taken over the city in early June. On 4th June, the forces of the government in Niamey retook the city, but it was again occupied by Boko Haram fighters in the days that followed. The battle claimed the lives of soldiers from Nigeria and Niger. 50,000 of the city's residents – children, women and the elderly in particular – were forced to flee the city into the stifling heat and without any humanitarian aid.¹⁵

Prospects for freedom of religion

The country's economic development has a decisive influence on security in Niger and thus on the state of religious freedom as well. There is good reason to expect jihadist groups and organisations to have less success in recruiting young people in future, provided that the effort to effectively combat poverty and create opportunities for young people succeeds. As the Catholic priest Father Mauro Armanino, who is working in Niger with the Society of African Missions, reports: "National school education is in an advanced stage of being dismantled. Health care and public finances are disastrous, and political life is full of endless scandals and corruption. All this is in the context of an extended state of emergency in various parts of the country because of terrorist attacks. The 2018 financial announcement that civil society fears could put citizens on the knees has contributed to awakening it from the fatal sleep it seemed to have fallen in."¹⁶

Western troops are stationed in Niger and the country has now become a strategically important in the effort to combat migration to Europe. Meanwhile, in light of the transnational terrorist threat in the Sahel region, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Chad and Niger are working together with the French military to combat jihadism in these countries as part of "Opération Barkhane". In February 2017, the countries of the so-called 'G5 Sahel' began building a joint West African anti-terror force with financial support coming from countries including Saudi Arabia.¹⁷ Their shared objective is to combat the cross-border terrorist threat existing in the Sahel region. Whether the presence of foreign troops in Niger will lead to cessation or even reversal of the spread of crime and jihadism in the region remains an open question.

Hopes regarding the stabilisation of the security situation lie in the long tradition of peaceful religious coexistence in Niger. In spite of the influence of jihadist organisations, there is a deep awareness within the population that more can be accomplished by working together for peace than can be achieved by war.¹⁸ As Archbishop Djalwana Laurent Lompo of Niamey emphasises: "We have good relations with the Muslims who are moderate. They come to our churches, and we visit them. You cannot generalise that Islam is bad;

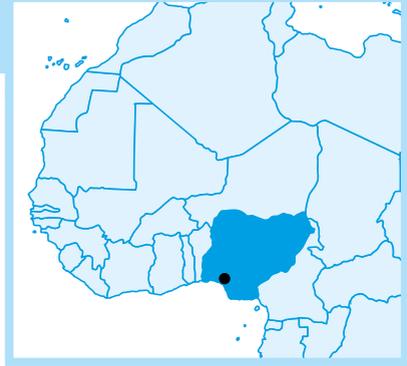
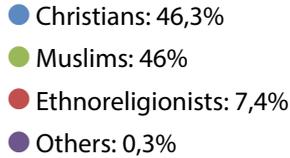
there are some individuals who have failed to understand anything. Dialogue helps us understand each other; it breaks down barriers. When Christians and Muslims meet, we try not to let hatred surface at all; this is how we do it in our schools, for instance, where we encounter one another in a spirit of openness.”¹⁹

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NIGERIA

RELIGION



AREA	POPULATION
923.768 km ²	186.988.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 15 of the constitution stipulates that no one may be discriminated against on grounds of his or her religion. Nigeria is a democratic federal republic consisting of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, where the capital, Abuja, is located and article 10¹ specifies that neither the federation nor any state may adopt a state religion. Article 38 of the constitution² also guarantees freedom of conscience and religion, including the liberty to practise and propagate a religion through instruction and the right to convert.³ The same article also provides that no one can be required to participate in religious instruction against his or her will if the instruction does not correspond to that individual's own religious affiliation. The same also holds true for religious ceremonies.⁴

To promote social integration in Africa's most populous country, article 15 of the constitution obliges the state to promote inter-faith marriages as well as clubs and associations that are open to members of different religions.⁵ The constitution also prohibits political parties from making religious affiliation a condition of party membership.⁶

Mohammadu Buhari, a former army general, has been President since 29th May 2015.⁷ Buhari is a Muslim; his predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan, is a Christian. The current Vice President, Yemi Osinbajo, is a member of a Christian Protestant community, the Pentecostal Redeemed Christian Church of God.⁸ The composition of the government is reflective of the broad religious spectrum of Nigeria. It is subject to change with every presidential election.

Similar to other countries of Africa, in Nigeria there is a gulf between the principles of the constitution and the reality of life in the country. For instance, President Buhari's government took office, it faced serious problems including corruption and widespread poverty. Economically, the country was largely dependent on oil and natural gas. During the current reporting period, the country had to focus on a number of issues, such as conflicts in different regions of the country. These include:⁹

- War and terror by the jihadist Boko Haram militia in the north-east of the country and neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and Niger (more than 20,000 deaths since 2009; more than two million refugees; millions of people reliant upon humanitarian aid; thousands of women and young people kidnapped, enslaved or forcibly recruited for military and

terrorist acts).¹⁰ According to official statements, since 2015, the Nigerian military, working with neighbouring countries, has pushed back Boko Haram. The Islamists militants have since split into factions and to date they have not been completely eliminated.¹¹

- Bloody attacks, mostly perpetrated against Christian farmers by militant Muslim Fulani livestock herders (several thousand deaths since 2010). In this conflict taking place in the multi-ethnic Middle Belt, a central issue is land, although cultural and religious questions are closely linked.¹²

- Violent religious conflicts in various parts of the country, the religious motif overlapping with socio-political backgrounds (several thousand deaths since 2000).¹³

- Latent, persistent tensions in the resource-rich Niger Delta against the central authorities (since 2006 and flaring up again in 2016).¹⁴

Overall, religious affiliation plays an important role in Nigeria's political system. Consequently, the party system is a reflection of the country's ethno-regional and religious composition.¹⁵ The ambitions and sensitivities of individuals and groups are often of greater significance than party programmes. Compounding this situation is the large number of parties, making the system unwieldy. There are currently nearly 150 organisations preparing for the elections to be held in February 2019. Of these, 67 had been given official recognition as of January 2018.¹⁶

As religion has long been a source of conflict in Nigeria, there are no official figures on religious affiliation.¹⁷ Christians and Muslims both claim to constitute the country's majority.¹⁸

Article 275 of the Nigerian constitution allows each state to set up a Shari'a Court of Appeal.¹⁹ Article 277 states that Islamic appeals courts have jurisdiction only in marriage and family law if all parties are Muslims.²⁰

In a controversial development, Islamic Shari'a law was introduced in criminal cases in 12 states in northern Nigeria beginning in 2000.²¹ The authority of Shari'a courts in criminal matters varies among the states.²² In the State of Zamfara in north-west Nigeria, criminal cases go before a Shari'a court when all parties are Muslim.²³ Shari'a courts may pass judgements and impose penalties based on Islamic criminal law. These penalties include caning, amputation and stoning.²⁴

Whether Shari'a law is compatible with Nigeria's federal constitution is a matter of controversy – especially where questions of criminal law are concerned.²⁵ Without doubt, the introduction of Islamic law in criminal cases has heightened tensions between Christians and Muslims in many parts in the country.

Incidents

Following numerous attacks by Islamist or jihadist groups, the situation of religious freedom in Nigeria has not improved in the reporting period and remains extremely tense. In some parts of the country, especially in central Nigeria, the situation has even deteriorated.²⁶

There are essentially three causes for this:

1. The terror perpetrated by the Islamic jihadist organisation Boko Haram,
2. Clashes between Islamic nomads and sedentary Christian farmers over land (central Nigeria),
3. Failure by the authorities to investigate infringements of religious freedom as set out in the country's constitution.

The perpetrators of this violence and intimidation are not limited to the jihadist terrorist militia Boko Haram, as is often assumed in Western countries. Although Boko Haram continues to commit bloody attacks in the north-east of the country, kidnapping girls and boys and engaging in human trafficking, the central and more southern areas in Nigeria's Middle Belt have also been destabilised as a result of attacks by other groups.

At dawn on 24th April 2018, there was a bloody attack at the Catholic church in the village of Aya-Mbalom in the central state of Benue.²⁷ According to survivors, the violence took place at the start of the early 5.30am Mass, when many parishioners were gathering for the service. Armed men entered the building and fired several shots. People panicked and tried to escape. Nineteen people, including the celebrants, Father Joseph Gor and Father Felix Tyloha, were murdered. Many others were injured.²⁸

According to some accounts, the Fulani had let their cattle graze around the village before storming the village and the church, armed with firearms and machetes.²⁹ Following the assault on the church, the armed group also attacked more than 60 houses and barns.³⁰ The residents fled to nearby villages. "We confirm the deaths of Rev Joseph Gor and Rev Felix Tyloha in the mortal attack by shepherd/jihadists in the village of Mbalom, parish of St Ignatius Ukpok-Mbalom," said a statement by the press office of the Diocese of Makurdi.³¹ The diocese's social communications officer, Rev Iorapuu, stated that massacres had been committed in other villages in the area as well, but "it seems the police knew nothing of attacks in other villages in Benue State."³²

In fact, the Nigerian press reported that, also on 24th April, at least 35 people were reported killed in the village of Tse Umenger in Mbadwem Council Ward, also in Benue State.³³ According to local witnesses, the massacre was committed by at least 50 armed nomads who had invaded the village at around 7am.

The massacres in various villages of Benue State exacerbated tensions in the state capital city of Makurdi, where several adolescents set car tyres on fire during protests.³⁴

Rev Iorapuu criticised the security forces. Despite similar attacks in other villages in the region, they were utterly unprepared, he told the news portal Daily Trust.³⁵ The priest warned against mounting conflicts in Benue in the wake of the ongoing influx of refugees fleeing armed conflict in the northern parts of the country.³⁶

In April 2018, Nasarawa State, north of Benue, was also the scene of multiple bloody attacks by Fulani herders on local farmers, who are ethnic Tiv. According to the Daily Post newspaper, a total of 39 people were killed and 15 houses destroyed.³⁷ (This is consistent

with information provided by project partners in Nasarawa to the charity Aid to the Church in Need following the attacks.) The municipalities of Awe, Obi, Keana, and Doma in the southern senatorial district of Nasarawa were also affected.³⁸

Following the massacres, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria called for the resignation of President Buhari.³⁹ “It is time for the President to choose the path of honour and consider stepping aside to save the nation from complete collapse,” the bishops said. The bishops’ statement expressed their shock: “These innocent souls met their untimely death at the hands of a wicked and inhuman gang of rampaging and murderous terrorists who have turned the vast lands of the Middle Belt and other parts of Nigeria into a massive graveyard.”⁴⁰

The bishops wrote: “[Rev] Jan Gor tweeted: ‘We live in fear the Fulani are back in the area of Mbalom. They refuse to leave. They continue to pasture their flocks. We have no means of defending ourselves.’ [...] Their desperate cries for security and help went unheeded by those who should have heard them,” the bishops complained. “They could have fled,” the bishops said, referring to the two priests, “but true to their vocation they remained to continue to serve their people right unto death.”⁴¹

The bishops accused the federal government and their security forces of having failed. “How can the federal government stand back while its security agencies deliberately turn a blind eye to the cries and wails of helpless unarmed citizens?” the bishops asked. “For over two years now the Catholic Bishops’ Conference along with many other well-meaning Nigerians have consistently asked the President to rethink the configuration of his security apparatus and strategy,” the statement went on to say. On 8th February, a delegation of Bishops visited the President to draw his attention to the precarious security situation. “Since then,” the Bishops emphasised, “bloodletting and destruction of homes ... have increased in intensity and brutality. [...] Today, we Christians feel violated and betrayed in a nation that we have all continued to serve and pray for,” the bishops wrote. “If the President cannot keep our country safe then he automatically loses the trust of the citizens”, they warned in conclusion.⁴²

During the reporting period, in the north-east of Nigeria and in neighbouring countries, the jihadist Boko Haram militia posed a particularly severe threat to the safety not only of Christians but of many Muslim citizens as well. Since 2009, Boko Haram has killed more than 20,000 people, and about 2.6 million people have been forced to flee their homes.⁴³ Added to this are thousands of children who have been kidnapped by the organisation and trained as fighters. The precise size of Boko Haram’s membership is difficult to determine. It is estimated to be at least several thousand.⁴⁴

President Buhari had declared the fight against Boko Haram to be a focus of his presidency.⁴⁵ Some inroads seem in fact to have been made towards weakening the organisation in some regions.⁴⁶ Still, there are no compelling reasons to assume that the Nigerian military has defeated Boko Haram, as President Buhari has repeatedly announced during the period under review. The opposite actually seems to be the case. The BBC, for instance, reported 150 attacks in 2017 – which is 23 more than in 2016.⁴⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

The prospects for religious freedom in Nigeria depend on three central concerns.

First, will the national government in Abuja succeed in ensuring security in the crisis-stricken areas of central and northeast Nigeria? To date, President Buhari has not provided enough resources to stop atrocities and prosecute those responsible. Failure to restore stability could lead to more famine and displacement.

Secondly, it is often poverty that drives people – especially the young – into the hands of the fundamentalists. Investment and development are urgently needed.

Thirdly, the government needs to ensure that religious freedom is enshrined in law.

The danger of Nigeria breaking up cannot be excluded, especially given the country's immense ethnic and cultural diversity.

Endnotes

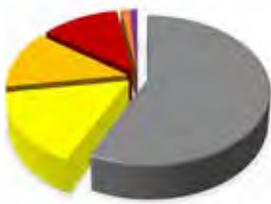
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NORTH KOREA

RELIGION



- Agnostics: 57%
- Atheists: 15,5%
- New Religionists: 12,8%
- Ethnoreligionists: 12,2%
- Buddhists: 1.5%
- Others: 1%



AREA	POPULATION
120.538km ²	25.281.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The citizens of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) "have freedom of religious beliefs", according to article 68 of the 1972 constitution (revised in 1998).¹ "This right is granted by approving the construction of religious buildings and the holding of religious ceremonies." However, "No one may use religion as a pretext for drawing in foreign forces or for harming the state and social order."

At the same time, article 3 states that "The DPRK is guided in its activities by the Juche idea, a world outlook centred on people, a revolutionary ideology for achieving the independence of the masses of people." Juche is an "immortal" idea, founded by the country's founding leader, Kim Il Sung.

The preamble to the constitution enshrines Kim Il Sung's place in the nation, stating that: "The great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung is the sun of the nation and the lodestar of the reunification of the fatherland. Comrade Kim Il Sung set the reunification of the country as the nation's supreme task, and devoted all his work and endeavors entirely to its realization. [...] The DPRK and the entire Korean people will uphold the great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung as the eternal President of the Republic, defend and carry forward his ideas and exploits and complete the Juche revolution under the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea."

Incidents

Despite the constitutional guarantee of "freedom of religious beliefs", North Korea is one of the few countries in the world where in practice there is absolutely no freedom of religion or belief at all. Citizens are required to show total devotion to the ruling Kim dynasty and the regime, and any deviance or suspected disloyalty – particularly by adopting a religious belief – is very severely punished. As the report of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on the Human Rights Situation of the DPRK, published in 2014, noted: "The state considers the spread of Christianity a particularly serious threat, since it challenges ideologically the official personality cult and provides a platform for social and political organization and interaction outside the realm of the State. Apart from the few organised state-controlled churches, Chri-

stians are prohibited from practising their religion and are persecuted. People caught practising Christianity are subject to severe punishments in violation of the right to freedom of religion and the prohibition of religious discrimination."The commission concluded that: "There is an almost complete denial of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as of the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, information and association." 2

A new report by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), titled *Movies, Markets and Mass Surveillance: Human Rights in North Korea After a Decade of Change*, noted that although escapees from North Korea described some changes in the country, including a greater level of awareness of the outside world as a result of radio broadcasts and information smuggled in on USB sticks, the overwhelming majority said that there has been no change in regard to freedom of religion, which is non-existent. If anything, most believed the situation had worsened. One respondent said: "When it comes to religion, North Korean people just shudder because punishment is very severe". Another reported: "There has been no change. Religious activity was unconditionally punished and it is the same now. There has been no change at all."³

The South Korea-based Database Centre for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB) estimates that there are 121 religious facilities in the country, approved and controlled by the state. These include 64 Buddhist temples, 52 Cheondoist temples, and five Christian churches. The churches are all in the capital, Pyongyang, and consist of three Protestant churches (Bongsu, Chilgol and Jeil churches), a Catholic church (Jangchung Cathedral) and Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church. There also exist state-sanctioned religious organisations, such as the Korean Christians' Federation (KCF), the Korean Buddhists Federation, the Korea Catholic Association (KCA), the Korea Cheondoist Society and the Korean Association of Religionists. The state-controlled KCA has no links with the Vatican, and although services take place at the Catholic Church, there are no Vatican-recognised Catholic priests or religious. Five Russian Orthodox priests serve at the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church, principally meeting the needs of Russians in the country.⁴

The state-controlled places of worship are widely believed to exist simply to create a positive impression of freedom of religion for foreign visitors, as part of a Potemkin-style show. One escapee told CSW: "I visited a temple once, a Buddhist temple. There were 150 monks. I observed them closely. But it was not a real Buddhist temple – it was there to show the outside world that North Korea has religious freedom, but it was 100 percent fake! ... There is no awareness of religion at all; not in 2007 and not now. There is no religious freedom."⁵

In 2015, the NKDB reported 1,165 violations of freedom of religion or belief in North Korea, including individuals charged with propagation of religion, possession of religious items, engagement in religious activities and contact with religious practitioners.⁶

Among religions in North Korea, Christianity is regarded with particular suspicion. In a report published in 2016 titled *Total Denial: Violations of Freedom of Religion and Belief in North Korea*, CSW notes that Christianity is identified as "a dangerous security threat and a tool of 'foreign intervention,'" and is seen as associated with South Korean and American intelligence agencies. A former North Korean security agent stated that Christianity is "so persecuted because basically, it is related to the United States ... and is considered spying. Since Ameri-

cans conveyed Christianity and since they are the ones who attempted to invade our country, those who are Christians are spies. Spies are executed.”⁷

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) confirms this. “The North Korean regime reviles Christianity and considers it the biggest threat among religions; the regime associates Christianity with the West, particularly the United States,” USCIRF notes in its 2018 Annual Report. “Through robust surveillance, the regime actively tries to identify and seek out Christians practicing their faith in secret and imprisons those it apprehends, often along with their family members even if they are not similarly religious.”⁸ Christians therefore worship and study the Bible in small numbers, in total secrecy. If they are discovered, they face certain imprisonment in a political prison camp, enduring hard labour and dire conditions, or in some cases face execution.

In December 2017 the War Crimes Committee of the International Bar Association published a report on crimes against humanity in North Korea’s political prison camps. The report noted that: “Christians are heavily persecuted and receive especially harsh treatment in prison camps”, where they are “tortured and killed on account of their religious affiliation”. Christians are “incarcerated in specific zones within the prison camp at which prisoners were subjected to more severe deprivation”.⁹

At the heart of the system of repression in North Korea are the brutal prison camps, known as kwan-li-so and sometimes referred to as “gulags”, where it is estimated that over 100,000 prisoners are held in dire conditions, subjected to systematic and severe torture, deprived of adequate food and subjected to a harsh system of forced labour in violation of international law, including mining, logging and intensive factory labour on minimal rations, causing extreme fatigue and sickness and eventually leading, in many cases, to death. It has been suggested that at least 25 percent of North Korea’s Christians are held in prison camps. Guilt by association is applied to detainees’ families, so that up to three generations can be punished.

A former inmate of Ordinary Prison Camp (kyohwaso) No. 1 at Kaechon, who was sent to prison for “expressing her Christian religion”, told the UN Commission of Inquiry that she was punished 10 times with solitary confinement during her seven years of detention. She was also assigned to pull the cart used to remove excrement from the prison latrines. Several times the guards made her lick off excrement that had spilled over in order to humiliate and discipline her.¹⁰

Access to the camps for international monitors has been impossible, and so information is only available from survivors of the camps and from satellite images and other intelligence. A detailed analysis of the camps was written by David Hawk, in *The Hidden Gulag: The Lives and Voices of Those Who are Sent to the Mountains*, first published by the Committee on Human Rights in North Korea in 2003, with an updated second edition in 2012.¹¹ In 2011 Amnesty International released satellite images showing the scale of the prison camps,¹² and in 2013 Amnesty International published new information suggesting an attempt by the authorities to hide the existence of the camps by merging them with existing villages.¹³

North Korean society is governed by a class structure known as “songbun”, which classifies people on the basis of family background and loyalty to the regime. Citizens are grouped into categories within the three main classes – the “core” class, which is the elite; the “wavering”

class; and the “hostile class”. According to the US State Department, Christians are restricted to the lowest class. The “songbun” system determines every aspect of life, including education, employment, access to health care and residence.¹⁴ A major report by the Committee on Human Rights in North Korea called *Marked for Life: Songbun – North Korea’s Social Classification System*, published in 2012, provides detailed analysis of this system.¹⁵

Most escapees become Christian after they escape across the border into China, where they come into contact with Christian missionaries helping refugees. However, China has a policy of forcibly repatriating North Koreans, a violation of the international principle of “non-refoulement”. For North Korean defectors who are sent back across the border to North Korea, among the first questions they are asked are whether they have met a missionary, possess a Bible, or had contact with South Koreans. Pregnant women face forced abortion and, for newborn babies, infanticide. North Koreans face a particularly grave fate if they are suspected of having had contact with Christian missionaries.

According to USCIRF, in June 2017 North Korean authorities arrested Kim Seung-mo, and charged him with espionage after learning that he had come into contact with Christian relatives during a visit to China.

On 4th November 2017 10 North Koreans were arrested after police raided the house where they were sheltering in Shenyang, northeast China, and were forcibly repatriated to North Korea. The group included a child aged four years old.¹⁶

In April 2016, a Christian pastor, Han Choong Yeol, was murdered close to the China-North Korea border. According to news reports, it is suspected that he was killed by North Korean agents, because of his work helping North Korean refugees to escape.¹⁷

In 2017, two US citizens, Kim Hak-song and Kim Sang-duk, who were teaching at the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST), a foreign-funded institution whose faculty and ethos is Christian, were arrested for alleged “hostile acts”. In May 2018 they were released, along with Kim Dong-chul, a South Korean-born naturalised American citizen who had been arrested in 2015, after diplomatic efforts by the US administration ahead of potential talks between Kim Jong-Un and US President Donald Trump.

While some foreign Christian humanitarian organisations are able to work in North Korea, and the faith-based PUST has existed since 2008, they are tightly controlled. Similarly, international religious organisations such as the World Council of Churches and some Buddhist organisations have engaged with North Korea, but usually only by ignoring or minimising concerns for human rights and freedom of religion or belief.

Prospects for freedom of religion

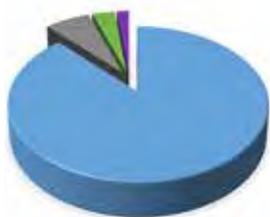
North Korea continues to be one of the very worst places in the world for freedom of religion or belief. It is one of the few countries where there is an almost complete denial of this basic human right, and systematic violation of every freedom set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Unless there is systematic change in the country, the prospects for freedom of religion remain unfavourable.

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NORWAY

RELIGION



- Christians: 88,1%
- Agnostics: 6,7%
- Muslims: 3,4%
- Others: 1,8%



NORWAY

AREA

386.194 km²

POPULATION

5.272.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Norway's constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion as well as the right to choose or change one's religion. Under a constitutional amendment, there is a separation between the Church of Norway and the state. However, the Church continues to receive financial support from the government. The constitution specifies that all religious and philosophical communities will be "supported on an equal footing".¹

All registered religious and spiritual communities are granted state subsidies in proportion to the number of members reported to the government. To register, a faith or spiritual organisation must provide specific information about its creed and doctrine, activities and governing rules. Unregistered groups do not receive financial support from the government, but their activities are not restricted.²

The law prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of religion or belief. This includes expressions of disrespect for religious beliefs or members of religious groups and covers violations of the right to religious freedom.³ Complaints concerning discrimination on the grounds of religion are made to the Ombudsman for Equality and Anti-Discrimination.⁴

Ritual slaughter practices not preceded by stunning are illegal, but halal and kosher food may be imported.⁵

Religious symbols, including headgear, may be worn with military uniforms, but not with police uniforms. The government permits individual schools to decide whether to implement bans on religious clothing that covers the face, such as burqas or niqabs.⁶ However, in June 2017 the government proposed a ban on full face-covering clothing, including burqas and niqabs, in nurseries, schools, and universities. Headscarves would continue to be permitted.⁷

Circumcision of boys is legal, so long as it is performed with a physician present. In May 2017, a party in the ruling coalition adopted a resolution to ban circumcision for males under 16 but was met with criticism from both Jewish and Muslim leaders.⁸

Religious instruction on "Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Information" is compulsory in public schools. The curriculum includes the study of world religions and philosophies, as

well as atheism. While students may not opt out of the course, parents may request that their children not participate in specific religious acts, such as Church services.⁹

In October 2016 the government launched an 11-point “Action plan against anti-Semitism 2016-2020”. Measures include training and education programmes, increased funding for Jewish cultural activities, police statistics targeting anti-Semitism as a separate form of hate crime and research on anti-Semitism in Norway.¹⁰

Incidents

The Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation responded to incidents seen as anti-Semitic by funding security for the Jewish synagogue in Oslo.¹¹ In September 2016, two “stumbling blocks” (bricks with brass plates naming a Holocaust victim) in front of the Jewish Museum in Oslo were vandalised with graffiti.¹²

A survey on attitudes toward Jews and Muslims in Norway carried out in 2017 by the Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities indicates that anti-Semitic views are more common among Muslims than in the general population: 28.9 percent of Muslim respondents living in Norway for at least five years hold negative views of Jews, compared to 8.3 percent for all respondents.¹³ When asked whether violence and harassment of Jews was justified based on how Israel treats Palestinians, 12 percent of all respondents agreed, with 20 percent of Muslim respondents agreeing with this. Two out of three Jewish respondents to the study said they have had to conceal their religion in public to avoid negative reactions.¹⁴

According to the same survey, 39 percent of respondents agreed with the statement “Muslims pose a threat to Norwegian culture” and 31 percent believe “Muslims want to take over Europe”.¹⁵

A hairdresser was found guilty of discrimination in September 2016 for refusing to serve a Muslim woman wearing a hijab. According to court documents, she told the woman she would not serve “people like her” and that she should go to another salon.¹⁶

Prospects for freedom of religion

While there was no significant change in governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period under review, an increased intolerance against minority religions within Norwegian society can be detected. This may, at least in part, reflect a backlash against global terrorism or geopolitical conflicts attributed to religious groups, as well as anti-immigration sentiments in Norway.

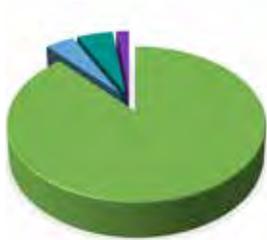
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OMAN

RELIGION



- Muslims: 88,4%
- Christians: 4,3%
- Hindus: 5,4%
- Others: 1,9%



AREA	POPULATION
309.000km ²	2.900.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Oman is a sultanate located on the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean. Three-quarters of its population, including the ruling dynasty, are Ibadi Muslims.¹ Neither Sunni nor Shi'a, Ibadis are descendants of an early branch of Islam. Oman is the only country in the world that has an Ibadi majority. The rest of the population consists of Sunnis and, to a lesser extent, Shi'as. A small number of Christian and Hindu families have been naturalised. Hindus have lived in Oman for centuries, having settled originally in Muscat.

Non-citizen residents, mostly foreign workers, make up around 45 percent of the country's population.² Among them are Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs. There are three Hindu temples and two Sikh gurdwaras.

About 180,000 Christians of different denominations live in Oman. Over 60 Christian groups are registered with the government. The Protestant and Catholic communities are recognised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.³

There are four Catholic parishes in Oman (two in Muscat, one in Sohar and one in Salalah). The parishes fall under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia (AVOSA). According to Church sources, the Catholic population numbers around 80,000.

The constitution of 1996, as amended in 2011,⁴ states in Article 1: "The Sultanate of Oman is an Arab, Islamic, Independent State with full sovereignty." Article 3 declares: "The religion of the state is Islam and Islamic Shari'a is the basis for legislation." Article 28 says: "The freedom to practise religious rites according to recognised customs is protected, provided it does not violate the public order or contradict morals."

Oman has no law that criminalises apostasy from Islam. However, a father who converts from Islam loses his paternal rights over his children.

Under Article 209 of Oman's Penal Code, anyone "who (1) publicly blasphemes God or the prophet Mohammed, (2) commits an affront to religions and faiths by spoken or written word, or (3) breaches the peace of a lawful religious gathering" is subject to "a term of imprisonment of between 10 days to three years, or a fine between five and 500

Omani Riyals (roughly US\$13 to \$1,300).⁵ Shari'a also applies in matters of inheritance and marriage to non-Muslims (Law 32 in Personal Status of 1997).⁶

"Using the Internet in a way that 'might prejudice public order or religious values' carries a penalty of up to one year in prison, and fines of at least 1,000 Riyals."⁷

Imams must possess a licence and preach the sermons issued by the government.⁸

The government does not allow religious groups to proselytise in public, but they can do so in private in registered places of worship.⁹

Non-Muslim groups may practise their religion according to their values, customs, and traditions without interference but only on land "specifically donated by the Sultan for the purpose of collective worship".¹⁰ Religious gatherings are allowed only within government-approved places of worship.

Incidents

There were no reports of governmental or societal abuse of religious freedom within the time period of this report. The lack of space for non-Muslim communities to worship and the difficulty of expanding remain a problem in Oman.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Although Oman has seen itself caught up in regional tensions, especially Sunni-Shi'a conflicts, it has succeeded in maintaining a relatively neutral position. It is well-known that Oman shares good relations with Iran which it has tried to maintain despite regional pressure. It is from this pressure that problems with the already limited freedom of religion might arise in the future.

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PAKISTAN

RELIGION



- Muslims: 96,3%
- Christians: 2%
- Hindus: 1,3%
- Others: 0,4%



PAKISTAN

AREA	POPULATION
796.095km ²	192.827.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Pakistan was founded as a secular state at the time of India's partition in 1947. Only gradually did the country's more militant Muslim character assert itself, for example, when its name was changed in 1956 to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Since then, the "land of the pure" (the word Pakistan is a neologism from pāk, "pure" in Urdu, and the suffix -stan, meaning country, with an i for easier pronunciation¹) took on a very distinctly Islamic orientation under the dictatorship of General Zia ul-Haq, in power from 1977 to 1988, as Islamic law (shari'a) played a greater role within the Pakistani legal system. In recent years, attempts by successive governments in Islamabad to fight interreligious violence and discrimination against non-Muslims have not met with much success, with society itself undergoing a very noticeable process of Islamisation.

The 1973 constitution stipulates in its preamble and in articles 20, 21 and 22 that all citizens enjoy the freedom to freely practise and profess the religion of their choice.² However, the right to religious freedom is considerably limited by Pakistan's constitutional, legal and political structures, which do not treat religious minorities as equal citizens to Muslims.

From a constitutional vantage point, article 2 of the constitution establishes that Islam is the religion of the state. Article 41, 2 states that the head of state must be a Muslim and article 91, 3 stipulates that the Prime Minister must also be a Muslim. According to article 203, E, the Federal Islamic Court has the power to invalidate any law contrary to Islam or to suggest amendments thereof. Moreover, on 7th September 1974, the second amendment to the constitution defined who could be considered a Muslim in Pakistan and who could not. This was formulated in such a way as to exclude the Ahmadiyya, a minority whose members consider themselves Muslims but whom majority Sunni Islam rejects as deviant and non-Muslim.

From a legal perspective, the so-called "blasphemy" laws, introduced in 1986 in the Pakistan Penal Code – articles 295 B, 295 C, 298 A, 298 B, 298 C – severely restrict freedom of religion and expression. Profaning the Qur'an and insulting Muhammad are both punishable offences, respectively carrying maximum sentences of life imprisonment and death. In everyday life, these laws are often used as a means to persecute religious

minorities. In recent years, various attempts to reform, or define the limits of, these laws have failed to effectively change what is in essence the sword of Damocles hanging over Pakistani citizens of whatever religious denominations.

From a political point of view, the so-called “separate electorate” system admittedly allows for political representation of religious minorities in the country’s elected assemblies: according to this scheme ten seats are reserved for them in the Federal Parliament, but this designates religious minorities as “apart” from the rest of the nation.³

In a country whose legal system is based on British law, it has long been thought that respect for the rule of law could be a hindrance to the Islamisation of society, or, at the very least, that minorities could rely on the courts to defend themselves against Muslim violence in the streets. Unfortunately, this has not always been not the case. On the contrary, for Ghulam Mustafa Chaudhry, head of the Khatm-e-Nubuwwat Lawyers’ Forum in Lahore, “Whoever does this [blasphemy], the punishment is only death. There is no alternative”⁴ – fiery words one might expect from the leader of an Islamist party or a conservative ulema. Such legal professionals, who are as active as they are discreet, have taken on the mission of ensuring that the anti-blasphemy laws are applied to the fullest extent possible.

According to a survey published by Reuters on 6th March 2016,⁵ the Khatm-e-Nubuwwat Lawyers’ Forum (Movement for the Defence of the Prophet), is trying to achieve this goal by using their expertise and influence in the legal system to ensure that anyone who insults Islam or Muhammad is indicted, tried and, where permitted by law, executed. In the case of the assassination of the Punjab Governor Salman Taseer,⁶ killed in January 2011 by his bodyguard for challenging the anti-blasphemy laws and defending a Christian woman, Asia Bibi,⁷ Ghulam Mustafa Chaudhry himself defended the accused – without success as Mumtaz Qadri was sentenced to death and executed on 29th February 2016. His burial, on 1st March 2016 in Islamabad, provided an opportunity for hundreds of thousands of Islamists to show their support. Indeed, according to Chaudhry, Mumtaz Qadri was right when he killed Salman Taseer, who blasphemed by publicly challenging the anti-blasphemy laws.

Obviously, the government’s attempts to regulate the application of anti-blasphemy laws face very strong opposition. In November 2015, the country’s Supreme Court ruled that simply discussing anti-blasphemy laws could not be considered blasphemy per se, but in practice it is impossible to carry out a calm and peaceful debate on this issue. In January 2016, the Council of Islamic Ideology, an official organisation in Pakistan, proposed amendments to the laws, but this could also lead to tougher legislation.

According to police statistics, blasphemy complaints recorded at police stations are on the rise. Since the founding of Khatm-e-Nubuwwat 15 years ago, the number of blasphemy cases in Punjab Province alone has tripled. A peak was reached in 2014 with 336 cases. This number dropped to 210 in 2015 when the province restricted the procedure for filing a complaint. Nevertheless, “If they hear of a complaint, the [Khatm-e-Nubuwwat] lawyers will come to the person and offer to take the case for free,” said a policeman, whose name

was withheld to avoid reprisals. “Sometimes they arrive with people and encourage them to make a complaint.”⁸

For the time being, no one sentenced to death for blasphemy has been executed in Pakistan, but the death rows in Pakistani prisons are gradually filling up. According to one report, of the more than 8,000 prisoners sentenced to death, more than 1,000 are blasphemy cases but the evidence is sharply divided on this point.⁹ Among them is that of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman whose accuser, at both the lower and appeal court levels, was assisted by a lawyer from Khatm-e-Nubuwwat.

Although government authorities, which resumed executions in 2014 (after a moratorium between 2008 and 2014), have not yet executed anyone in blasphemy cases, they have nevertheless failed to prevent extrajudicial executions. According to the Centre for Research and Security Studies, an independent Pakistani organisation, at least 65 people have been lynched¹⁰ or murdered since 1990 – including judges and lawyers – on suspicion of blasphemy or for taking the defence of people accused of blasphemy.

Gone are the days in the early 2000s when lawyers rose up against the repressive measures taken by President Pervez Musharraf (in power from 2001 to 2008). Back then, people were talking about the Lawyers’ Movement, the Movement for the Restoration of the Judiciary, and the Black Coat Protests. Now, these pro-democracy lawyers seem to be much less visible whereas the lawyers who want greater Islamisation of society seem more virulent.

Incidents

According to Archbishop Joseph Arshad of Islamabad-Rawalpindi, who is President of the National Commission for Justice and Peace, there is an “alarming increase in violent incidents of intolerance and extremism in our country.”¹¹ These incidents target religious minorities because of their faith, the National Commission for Justice and Peace said in a statement. “These attacks on minorities are not acceptable and the state must seriously revisit the National Action Plan,”¹² it added. The National Action Plan (NAP) was put in place after an Islamist attack on 16th December 2014 at a Peshawar military school that killed 141 people, including 132 children. The NAP is structured around two areas: security and legislation.

On the security front, the army is trying to try to incapacitate terrorist groups. One example is the elimination in May 2018 of Salman Badeni and two of his relatives during a Special Forces raid in Killi Almas, a village near Quetta, Balochistan.¹³ Salman Badeni was the leader of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Balochistan, a group suspected of carrying out deadly attacks against more than a hundred Shi’as from the Hazara ethnic minority and about 15 Christians from Quetta.

At the legislative level, in February 2017, the National Assembly – the lower house of Parliament – passed a law to prohibit hate speech, sectarian attacks and forced marriages of girls from religious minorities. According to Samuel Pyara, president of Bright Future Society, a Lahore-based Christian association, “these steps are crucial to save our

country [...] Lynching as a way of doing justice to oneself has become a 'normal' mode of operating our society. It was therefore necessary to punish such acts and we appreciate the action of the government”.

Others point to the fact that it is not so much the law that is the problem than the violence and corruption at work in Pakistani society.

“The heart of the problem lies in the application of the law, as well as in the frequent inaction of a police force where corruption is widespread and which perceives Christians with animosity as a 'ritually impure' community;”¹⁵ said Wilson Chowdhry, president of the British Pakistani Christian Association. Mr Chowdhry said that the acquittal by an anti-terrorist court in Lahore, on 28th January 2017, of 115 suspects indicted after the March 2013 violence in Joseph Colony, a Christian neighbourhood in Lahore, is an all too common occurrence.

Nobody seems to be safe from armed extremists in Pakistan. On 6th May 2018, a gunman targeted the Federal Minister of the Interior, Ahsan Iqbal, on a visit to his Punjab constituency. After meeting with a group of Christians from Kanjroor village in Narowal District, the minister was targeted by a man, eventually stopped by the minister's bodyguards, after he had already fired a shot. The Minister was injured when the bullet passed through his arm before entering his groin, but he was not mortally wounded. The gunman, identified as Abid Hussain, claimed to be a member of Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan, a political party that is fundamentally opposed to any challenge to anti-blasphemy laws. He said he acted to prevent the government from calling into question the definition of Muhammad as the last prophet, an issue that divides Ahmadis from main-stream Muslims. In 2017, this party had protested for three weeks in Islamabad demanding that the anti-blasphemy laws not be debated. In the end, the Islamist militants won their case because the Federal Law Minister stated that the legislation would not be amended. Without the intervention of his bodyguards, the Minister of Interior would have joined two other important Pakistani political figures who were assassinated, namely Salman Taseer, the Governor of Punjab, and Shahbaz Bhatti, the Minister of Minorities. In early January 2011, Taseer, a Muslim, was gunned down; at the beginning of March 2011, Shahbaz Bhatti, a Catholic, was also killed. In both cases, the two victims were murdered for defending Asia Bibi and calling into question the application of anti-blasphemy laws in the country.

Asia Bibi has been waiting on death row for almost eight years. Accused of blasphemy by a Muslim neighbour, she was sentenced to death in November 2010, a decision upheld on appeal in October 2014. In October 2016, the Supreme Court postponed indefinitely the hearing to make a final ruling in her case. But in May 2018 her lawyers were informed that a new appeal could be heard soon. Any optimism seems highly premature because “the Asia Bibi affair” has divided Pakistani society between the proponents of a certain liberalism who want to see the prisoner freed and Islamists who demand her execution.

According to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, about 40 people have been sentenced to life imprisonment or are awaiting execution for blasphemy in Pakistani prisons. There are few signs of any positive developments in this area: on 30th

December 2017, the Supreme Court ordered the release of Muhammad Mansha since the case against him was based on the “non-availability of solid evidence”.¹⁶ Muhammad Mansha, a Muslim, was serving a life sentence for “blasphemy” and had already spent nine years in detention. On the other hand, the scope of anti-blasphemy laws has been extended to the sphere of electronic communications. In June 2017, Taimoor Raza, a Shi’a Muslim, was sentenced to death for blasphemous remarks posted on Facebook, a popular social media in Pakistan.¹⁷ This is the first time that a death sentence for blasphemy had been pronounced in the country for comments made on a digital platform. The sentence follows the enactment in 2016 of a law on cybercrime that extends the penalties provided by the Penal Code to offences and crimes committed via the Internet.¹⁸

The forced marriages of young girls also devastates religious minorities. In recent years, the growing phenomenon of the forced conversions of Hindu girls in Sindh Province has become a major problem for the Hindu community. According to the Pakistan Hindu Panchayat Association, every year nearly 1,000 girls and young women in Sindh are forced to convert to Islam, which has sparked an exodus of Hindu families to neighbouring India. In February 2016, a law was passed in Sindh prohibiting this form of violence but it is still too early to see if it will have any real effect. Certainly girls have continued to be targeted. To give one example, in late December 2017, three gunmen abducted a 14-year-old Hindu girl from her home in Thar village, Sindh Province. Her father made enquiries and was informed that she had freely converted to Islam and married local man Naseer Lunjo. The family dismisses any claim that she freely converted. Police have refused to get involved.¹⁹ Indeed, in Pakistan, where civil marriage does not exist, Hindus, unlike Muslims and Christians, could not register their marriage with civil authorities until last year,²⁰ which made their daily lives difficult, especially in obtaining identity papers, enforcing property rights or gaining inheritance. The situation of Hindu women is even more difficult. Since Pakistan did not recognise their marital status, they were considered single, even when married to a Hindu, and were therefore easy prey for abductors of non-Muslim women.²¹

This form of violence against women does not only affect Hindus. Other religious minorities are also vulnerable. For example, on 22nd April 2018 young Christian woman Asma Yaqoob was killed. The 25-year-old was employed as a maid by a Muslim in Sialkot, a town located some 100 kilometres from Lahore. According to the young woman’s father, she was sprayed with acid and gasoline for refusing the advances of one of the men of the household where she worked who wanted to marry her. The young woman died after five days of agony in hospital: nine tenths of her body had third-degree burns.²²

In this context, good news is rare indeed. One can mention here the inauguration, on 15th April 2018, of a Christian chapel on the campus of Faisalabad’s University for Agriculture. In a country that has 177 universities and institutes of higher education, this is the first time that a non-Muslim place of worship is allowed. At the inauguration, Archbishop Joseph Arshad of Islamabad-Rawalpindi, cited the words of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the father and founder of the nation: “You are free; you are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the state.”²³

Prospects for freedom of religion

2018 is an election year in Pakistan. Early parliamentary elections were called for the start of July. The PMLN (Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz) faces serious setbacks since the Supreme Court impeached Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in July 2017 for corruption. Since then Sharif has been banned from leading the party that he founded and is prohibited from participating in any election for the rest of his life. This election could lead to violent demonstrations during which religious minorities could be easy targets.

On 17th December 2017 a suicide bomber took the lives of nine people and injured 60 more. Daesh (ISIS) claimed responsibility for the attack, which targeted the Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in Quetta, Balochistan. Government authorities denied the claim saying that Daesh is not present in Pakistan.²⁴ This did not stop US President Donald Trump from suspending US aid to Pakistan (US\$ 3 billion) for the fiscal year 2018 until the Pakistani government gets more results in the fight against Islamist terrorist organisations active in country whose actions impact the security situation in Afghanistan. In early January 2018, the United States placed Pakistan on a Special Watch List for serious violations of religious freedom,²⁵ along with countries like Burma, China, Iran, North Korea and Saudi Arabia. While waiting for a possible improvement of the situation in the country, the number of Pakistanis from religious minorities who want to leave continues to grow. According to Senator Ramesh Kumar, a Hindu politician elected by the “separated electorate”, some 5,000 Hindus leave Pakistan every year as a result of the persecution they face.²⁶

Catholic Archbishop Joseph Coutts, 72, of Karachi, the port city located in the south of the country, became a cardinal of the Church on 29th June 2018. On 20th May 2018, he told the press that inter-religious dialogue was a priority. But, at the same time, he did not hide the fact that violence was “a problem that is affecting the whole country. This extremist, very fanatic form of Islam, which is not the Islam of the general population, is affecting not only Christians and other non-Muslims, but the terrorists are not sparing even Muslims. They are targeting shrines and mosques. [...] People, as a result of the persecution, begin to lose confidence. They lose confidence in the government to do something. [...] We should join hands with people who are open to all communities.”²⁷

Endnotes

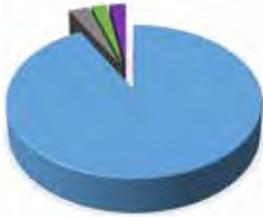
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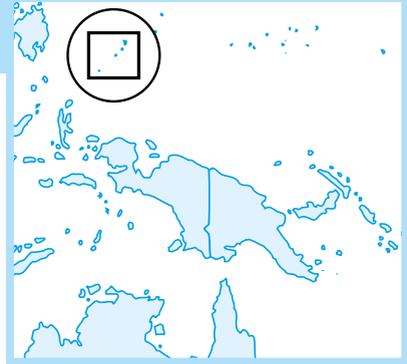
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PALAU

RELIGION



- Christians: 92,1%
- Agnostics: 3%
- Muslims: 2,4%
- Others: 2,5%



AREA
459km²

POPULATION
21.500

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Located to the south-east of the Philippines, Palau is an archipelago of some 250 islands that form the western chain of the Caroline Islands. More than half the country's population lives in Koror State. Once a part of the Spanish East Indies, the islands were incorporated within the American-governed Trust Territory along with other islands in the Pacific after United States' troops liberated Palau from the Japanese during the Second World War. The country gained full sovereignty in 1994 and has a Compact of Free Association¹ with the U.S. The U.S. and Palau maintain close economic, political and security ties.

Under article 4.1 of the constitution the government shall not discriminate against any citizen on the basis of religion or belief. It shall take no action to "deny or impair the freedom [...] of religious belief of any person nor take any action to compel, prohibit or hinder the exercise of religion"² The constitution prohibits the creation of a state religion. The state may provide funding to "private or parochial schools on a fair and equitable basis for non-religious purposes"³

The population is mainly Christian and Catholicism is the principal form of Christianity. Some estimates state that around half of the population is Catholic. Other religious groups include the Evangelical Church (around 27 percent) and Seventh Day Adventists (around 7 percent).⁴ The Modekngai faith is unique to the country and, according to some sources, is professed by about 5.7 percent of the inhabitants.⁵ Followers combine Christianity with ancient Palauan, animistic beliefs. Many of the followers live in the small town of Ibobang and attend daily church services. The Belua Modekngai School is located in the town.

There are also small groups of Muslims, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists and members of the Assembly of God, as well as other religious groups. There are two mosques in the country. Among the expatriate community, there are around 400 Bengali Muslims and around 7,000 Filipino Catholics.

Despite the fact that there is no state religion, Christmas is a national holiday and most national events include a Christian prayer to open and close the ceremonies. Religious groups must register as non-profit organisations. By registering as non-profit organisations, churches and missions are exempt from tax. Foreign missionaries are also required

to obtain a permit from the Bureau of Immigration and Labor. Within the two-year period under review, there were no reports of the government denying permits to individuals.⁶

The law does not allow religious instruction in public schools. However, the government provides financial aid for all private religious schools.⁷ The constitutional guarantees of religious freedom are respected in practice.

Incidents

There were no reports of significant state-sponsored or societal infringements regarding the right to freedom of religion.

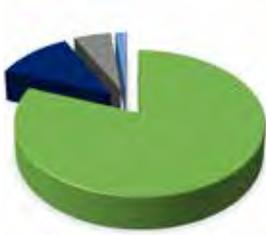
Prospects for freedom of religion

The government and society respect freedom of religion. There is no reason to believe that this is likely to change in the foreseeable future.

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RELIGION



● Muslims: 81%
● Jews: 11,7%
● Agnostics: 5,7%
● Christians: 1,4%
● Others: 0,2%



AREA
6.020km²

POPULATION
4.797.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council and the International Court of Justice consider the Palestinian Territories to be under Israeli occupation.¹ The territories came into being in June 1967 when Israel seized areas from Jordan and Egypt, including East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. In 1993, in the course of the so-called Oslo process, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) formally recognised each other. One year later, the Palestinian (National) Authority (PA) was established as an institution of Palestinian self-rule in certain areas of the West Bank and Gaza, but not East Jerusalem, which Israel considers an integral part of its capital.

Since then, bilateral negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians to create two states existing side by side have not been successful. In 2005 Israel withdrew from Gaza but continues to control access to the strip. Hamas took over Gaza in 2007. Several armed conflicts have broken out between Israel and Hamas since then. The Palestinian Territories have been split between the internationally recognised government in Ramallah and the Hamas-controlled Gaza.² In November 2012 the General Assembly of the United Nations recognised Palestine as a non-member observer state. Palestine is currently recognised by 137 states.³

Fatah, which controls the PA in the West Bank, and Hamas signed a reconciliation agreement on 11th October 2017. Hamas agreed to transfer administrative control of Gaza and the Rafah border crossing with Egypt to the PA. In return, the Palestinian Authority would lift its sanctions to ease Gaza's economic blockade.⁴

The US government estimates the Palestinian population to be 2.7 million in the West Bank and 1.8 million in the Gaza Strip.⁷ Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) estimates 536,600 Jewish Israelis live in Jerusalem, i.e. approximately 61 percent of the city's total population of 882,652.⁶ According to the same source, Jerusalem is home to about 332,600 Palestinians, including approximately 12,000 Palestinian Christians and 2,000 non-Palestinian Christians. According to the CBS, an estimated 400,000 Jewish Israelis live in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Around 50,000 Christians live in the West Bank and Jerusalem, with another thousand in Gaza. Most Christians are Greek Orthodox, while the others include Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics (Melkites), Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Armenian Catholics, Copts, Maronites,

Ethiopian Orthodox, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and other Protestant denominations. Christians are found mainly in East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Nablus. There are also some 360 Samaritans (an offshoot of ancient Judaism), plus small groups of Evangelical Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses in Jerusalem and the West Bank.⁷ The status of East Jerusalem is still disputed and causes recurrent tensions.

According to the Report on Palestine Administration 1922⁸ issued by British authorities, Christians represented 9.6 percent of the population in 1922 (Palestine and Transjordan). Nowadays, it is estimated that they represent between 1 percent and 2.5 percent of the population of the West Bank⁹ and less than 1 percent in the Gaza Strip.¹⁰

Palestine has no constitution but the Palestinian Basic Law serves as one.¹¹ Article four states: "Islam is the official religion in Palestine. Respect for the sanctity of all other divine religions shall be maintained. The principles of Islamic Shari'a shall be a principal source of legislation." According to article nine, "Palestinians shall be equal before the law and the judiciary, without distinction based upon race, sex, colour, religion, political views or disability." Article 18 states: "Freedom of belief, worship and the performance of religious functions are guaranteed, provided public order or public morals are not violated." Article 101 says that Shari'a affairs and personal status shall be assumed by Sharia and religious courts in accordance with the law.

On 1st April 2014, the Palestinian Authority signed several human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Previously, in 2007, the PA also ratified the Arab Charter on Human Rights. These treaties all deal with various aspects of freedom of religion.¹²

Legally, conversion from Islam is not explicitly forbidden although in practice doing so would cause massive social pressure. Proselytism is forbidden.

By a presidential decree of 2001, the mayors of municipalities – Ramallah, Bethlehem, Beit Jala and seven others – must be Palestinian Christians even if there is no Christian population majority in those cities.¹³ Another presidential decree from 2005 allocates six seats to Christians in the 132-member Palestinian Legislative Council.¹⁴ Up until 2006, one seat was reserved for the Samaritan community, which lives on the slope of Mount Garizim near Nablus.¹⁵ President Abbas has Christian ministers and advisers. Christians are also represented in the PA foreign service and its administration.

A presidential decree from 2008 officially recognises 13 Churches. These include the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and the Armenian Apostolic Churches. Ecclesiastical courts decide on matters of personal status, including marriage, divorce and inheritance in accordance with Church laws. Other Churches, mostly Evangelical ones, are not officially registered but can operate freely. However, they do not have the same rights when it comes to matters of personal status.

In 2015 the Comprehensive Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Palestine was signed by both parties. In January 2016 it came into full force. The Comprehensive Agreement deals with essential aspects of the life and activity of the Catholic Church in Palestine, including

the freedom of the Church to operate and of Christians to practise their faith and participate fully in society.¹⁶ The agreement was the first of its kind in the Arab-Muslim world.

US President Donald Trump's decision to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and therefore recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, has sparked tensions, leading to violent demonstrations in the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem.

Incidents

At Easter 2018, the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), a unit in Israel's Ministry of Defence, decided to restrict the access of Christians to Israel. According to COGAT, this is because in previous years, visitors from Gaza overstayed their permitted time in Israel. Only Christians aged 55 and older and children under age 16 are be allowed to enter Israel for Easter.¹⁷ Israel usually eases access restrictions during religious holidays in order to allow Palestinians to visit holy sites in Jerusalem. A Christian leader in Gaza, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that such restrictions actually meant that only about one third of the community's 1,100 members were allowed to enter Israel to celebrate Easter. Wadie Abunassar, spokesman for the Assembly of the Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, said that the restrictions were "very sad" adding that Easter is a family holiday and that it was "not reasonable" to allow parents to enter Israel while "leaving their children back in Gaza."¹⁸

The situation in the Gaza Strip is of grave concern. In an interview published in the June 2017 issue of pro Terra Sancta, Tommaso Saltini, Director of the Association pro Terra Sancta declared that he had "always been impressed by the richness of the Christian presence in Gaza. It's a small community, but it is full of hope" despite "the great suffering it has experienced. They always help everyone without distinctions."¹⁹

Father Mario da Silva, parish priest of the Holy Family Church, the Gaza Strip's only Roman Catholic parish, said in an interview published in April 2018 that over six years, the number of Christians in the Gaza Strip has dropped from 4,500 to just 1,000.²⁰ Father da Silva works with 12 religious Sisters from different congregations (the Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matará, the Missionaries of Charity, and the Sisters of the Rosary).

According to Father da Silva, "the young people who were authorised to visit the holy sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem last Easter did not return. [...] They remained in the city where Jesus was born and found a job, laying the foundations for a new life. That is why, here, people want to leave. [...] Christians live mainly with debts, buying on credit from the supermarket and promising to pay later. Christian charities help out by paying off the debts. The jobless are forced to beg and count on the generosity of others."²¹ He added: "With the help of institutions such as the Pontifical Mission or the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Church tries to give work to more than 30 young people so they won't leave, because they are mainly the ones who leave."²²

The Brazilian-born priest insisted that the Church is involved in "preserving the integrity of the faith, defending it, and teaching Christians how to live amid hardships and a Muslim majority."²³ He added that the local Church also helps members of other religions: "The Christian

community is very small and there are 2 million Muslims. They are also in great need. We have always opened the doors of our schools or our church during times of war to take in those seeking refuge.”²⁴

Father da Silva said Gaza’s Christians feel abandoned by the international community and would like other Churches and Catholics around the world to pay “more attention” to them.²⁵ “The world pays attention to us only when there is a war. Fortunately, there are some groups and institutions like the Pontifical Mission, Friends of the Holy Land, and a few others who help us”, added Father da Silva.²⁶

Gaza Christians now face new challenges, one of them being the possible infiltration of Daesh (ISIS) militants into the strip as a result of its proximity to the Sinai Peninsula and the Egyptian border at Rafah. Daesh militants have been active in the Sinai Peninsula and have targeted Christians.

Prospects for freedom of religion

There is no religious freedom in the Palestinian Territories under PA control in the sense of citizens having the right to follow a religion or not and to change from one religion to another. Nevertheless, there is a high level of individual and collective freedom of worship. The Palestinian leadership publicly praises the presence and contribution of Palestinian Christians.

The situation of Christians is more complicated in Gaza. Hamas tolerates the small group of Christians and their institutions within certain boundaries that exclude active proselytism. Gaza is home to some very radical groups who have threatened the territory’s Christians. Both Palestinian Muslims and Christians from the West Bank and Gaza suffer from the Israeli occupation, which also limits the exercise of their religious freedom. Israel regulates the access of both Muslims and Christians from the West Bank and Gaza to their Holy Sites in East Jerusalem. Residents of PA-controlled areas cannot visit East Jerusalem without a permit issued by the Israeli civil administration of the territories. In many cases, permits are not issued or they are issued to some members of a family but not to others. Church leaders regularly denounce the practice as opaque and arbitrary. In most cases, settler violence against Muslim and Christian places in the territories institutions goes unpunished.

Christians are caught between camps, and for many of them, the situation is getting increasingly difficult.

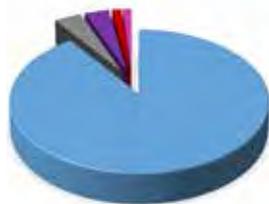
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PANAMA

RELIGION¹



- Christians: 90,3%
- Agnostics: 3,8%
- Ethnoreligionists: 1,3%
- Baha'is: 1,2%
- Others: 3,4%



AREA³
75.320km²

POPULATION⁴
3.990.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The protection of God is invoked in the preamble of the constitution.¹ Under article 35, "all religions may be professed and all forms of worship practised freely, without any other limitation than respect for Christian morality and public order. It is recognised that the Catholic religion is practised by the majority of Panamanians." The constitution stipulates in article 19 that "there shall be no public or private privileges, or discrimination, by reason of race, birth, social class, handicap, sex, religion or political ideology".

Aside from the performance of duties inherent to their missions, article 45 states that ministers of religion "may hold public posts only when such positions are related to social welfare, public education, or scientific research." Article 139 states that it is illegal to establish political parties based on religion. Before taking office, the President and Vice President of the republic take the oath of office with the words set out in article 181: "I swear to God and to the country to comply faithfully with the constitution and the laws of the republic." However, article 181 states that citizens who do not profess religious belief can dispense with the invocation of God in the oath. Religious organisations have, according to article 36, "juridical capacity and manage and administer their property within the limits prescribed by law, the same as other juridical individuals".

According to article 94, both public and private schools "are open to all students without distinction of race, social position, political ideology, [or] religion." Under article 107 of the constitution, "the Catholic religion shall be taught in public schools." However, at the request of their parents or guardians, this article goes on to state that "students shall not be obliged to attend religion classes, nor to participate in religious services".

Incidents

In September 2016 an inter-faith meeting was held on the second World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation convened by Pope Francis, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Panama, the Ecumenical Committee of Panama and an organisation called the Interreligious Dialogue of Panama.²

In February 2017 the mother of a Rastafarian child filed a case claiming religious discrimination against her son's school. The school told her that its rules require pupils to wear uniforms and their hair without plaits. She alleged that her son's hairstyle was a matter of religious practice. After a meeting between the boy's mother, Rastafarian community representatives and the school administration, an agreement was reached enabling the child to attend the school without further problems.³

In April 2017 during Holy Week, the Mayor of Panama prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages on Good Friday. He also banned the use of musical equipment and dances. The measure was meant "to guarantee respect for the religious principles of citizens"⁴

In May 2017, there was a controversy after the creation of a new political party allegedly based on Evangelical Christianity. It was claimed that the party's creation flouted the constitution, which makes it illegal to establish political parties based on religion. The leader of the proposed party denied that it was religiously oriented. He pointed out that its provisional statutes and related documentation did not contain any references to religious beliefs.⁵

Since 2016 a wave of violence has hit the province of Colón, with multiple deaths. In March 2018, before the government accepted a mediation effort by the Catholic Church and the Colón-based social movement of Columbus, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Panama issued a call for peace and reconciliation and urged the parties to maintain a climate of respect and tolerance so that dialogue could get underway.⁶

In February 2018 the Organising Committee of the World Youth Day and the National Association for the Conservation of Nature signed a memorandum of understanding to ensure that environmental care would be part of the planning and organisation of the event. The goal is to minimise its impact on the environment. Panama will host the next World Youth Day in January 2019.⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

In the period under review, there were no significant departures from the principles of religious freedom guaranteed by the constitution. Compared to the previous period, the state of freedom of religion improved and future prospects seem good.

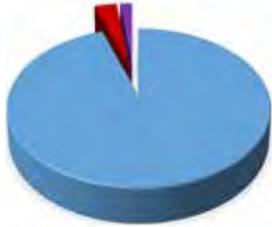
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PAPUA NEW GUINEA

RELIGION



- Christians: 94,9%
- Ethnoreligionists: 3,3%
- Others: 1,8%



AREA	POPULATION
462.840 km ²	7.776.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Independent State of Papua New Guinea includes the eastern half of the island of New Guinea and some offshore islands in Melanesia. It is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world with 848 languages. Most of its nearly eight million inhabitants live in traditional rural communities. Only 18 percent of the population live in urban areas.

There is no official state religion in Papua New Guinea. However, the preamble to the constitution pledges “to guard and pass on to those who come after us our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are ours now.”¹ Under article 55 of the constitution, all citizens have “the same rights, privileges, obligations and duties” regardless of their religion. According to article 45, section 1, the individual’s right to freedom of religion includes the “freedom to manifest and propagate his religion and beliefs in such a way as not to interfere with the freedom of others”. Article 45 also states: “No person is entitled to intervene unsolicited into the religious affairs of a person of a different belief, or to attempt to force his or any religion (or irreligion) on another.” The right to religious freedom may under article 303 be qualified by law in the interests of “defence”, “public safety”, “public order”, “public welfare”, “public health”, “the protection of children and persons under disability” or “the development of underprivileged or less advanced groups or areas”. It is not subject to derogation under emergency laws.

Under article 42, section 2 of the constitution, no one is compelled “to receive religious instruction or to take part in a religious ceremony,” but this excludes religious instruction given to children with the consent of a parent or a guardian. Currently, it is Department of Education policy to allow an hour of religious instruction per week. Although these sessions are not mandatory, most students attend.² In January 2017, the Chief Secretary to Government, Issac Lupari, brought forward a proposal to add Bible Studies to school curricula.³ In November 2017, he announced that the government would make religious education a compulsory subject in 2019. He believes that this is necessary to help address some of the social ills in Papua New Guinean society and to assist personal development.⁴

Churches provide around half of the country’s health and education services.⁵ The government subsidises these services on a pro rata basis. It also pays the salaries and

employment benefits of staff at these institutions, as it does for staff at public institutions. At Church-run organisations, healthcare and education are provided to patients and students regardless of the religious beliefs.⁶ In 2016 the government cut funding to Church-run health centres by 50 million kina (US\$ 20 million), a move Churches attribute to the government seeking to shift the financial burden onto them.⁷ At the end of 2017 Christian Health Services reported that they had not received salaries for their employees for four months and announced that, as a consequence, the services were threatened with closure.⁸

In order to obtain corporate legal status, religious groups must register with the authorities. This enables them to own properties, benefit from limited liability and also to qualify for certain tax exemptions. The government is not reported to have refused registration to any group that has submitted an application.⁹

Foreign missionaries and other religious workers may apply for visas to enter the country under the “special exemption category” provided they are not engaged in “business activities” on behalf of the Church (which require a different type of visa).¹⁰ Applicants need a letter of sponsorship from a religious organisation within Papua New Guinea and must pay a small application fee. These visas are valid for three years. There are no reports of visa applications being refused.

Papua New Guinea celebrates the following days of the Christian calendar as national holidays: Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter, Easter Monday and Christmas. There is a National Day of Repentance on 26th August, also a public holiday.¹¹ Official public events often open and close with Christian prayer.¹²

Incidents

Near the end of 2013, a controversy broke out in Papua New Guinea when the speaker of the Parliament, Theodore Zurenuoc, removed or destroyed indigenous artefacts from Parliament House. He described the latter as “ungodly images and idols” and planned to replace them with Christian symbols. On 31st May 2016, the Supreme Court ordered that the artefacts be reinstated.¹³ While leaders from the Lutheran Renewal Church and the Assemblies of God supported the speaker’s actions, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomons criticised him.¹⁴

The Papua New Guinea Council of Churches (PNGCC) is an ecumenical movement founded in 1965. Its members include the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the United Church, the Anglican Church, the Baptist Union, the Salvation Army and the Gutnius Lutheran Church. It also has a large number of associate members.¹⁵ Papua New Guinea’s Seventh Day Adventists and Pentecostalists are not members. The PNGCC promotes dialogue between members and social welfare projects, and occasionally intervenes in public debates.

By far the worst social incidents are violent attacks inspired by belief in sorcery (sanguma). This belief has its roots in traditional Melanesian understandings of the workings of

spirits and is still relatively widespread. The 1971 Sorcery Act, which allowed sorcery as a defence to a murder charge, was not repealed until 2013. Attacks on those accused of sorcery remain commonplace.¹⁶

In November 2017, a six-year-old girl accused of sorcery was attacked in Enga province. She was rescued by a small group of people, including an American missionary, and was treated for multiple burns sustained from heated bush knives. In 2013, the girl's mother had been stripped, bound and set on fire with petrol before a large crowd of people in Papua New Guinea's third-biggest city, Mount Hagen. The mother, named Keparani Leniata, had also been accused of sorcery.¹⁷

In January 2018 alone, there were two high-profile incidents. In early January, the country's Chief Justice, Sir Salamo Injia, was ambushed because his tribe had failed to pay compensation for a man's death, apparently due to sorcery. The incident followed the kidnapping and torture of two women from the judge's tribe, who had been accused of *sanguma*.¹⁸ In a separate incident the same month, residents from a village north of Port Moresby attacked a man they thought had used witchcraft to cause the death of rugby star Kato Ottio during a training session.¹⁹

The Papua New Guinean justice system has struggled to hold those accused of sorcery-inspired attacks to account, mainly because communities protect the perpetrators and are unwilling to give evidence against them. However, in January 2018 almost 100 people in Madang were convicted for the sorcery-related killings of seven people in 2014.²⁰ The police commission has launched an anti-sorcery taskforce, but it reportedly lacks the resources it needs to operate effectively.²¹ There are also grass-roots initiatives to try to tackle the problem of attacks.

The Australian immigration detention centre on Manus Island has attracted international attention. In October 2017, the Australian government said it would fund "transit centres" as an alternative arrangement for migrants, and provide healthcare, benefits and security. Refugees on the island have been the victims of a spate of robberies and assaults. In February 2018, three men from Iraq, Iran and Pakistan were transferred to hospital with multiple injuries.²² These attacks have sometimes been construed as anti-Muslim; however, criminal violence is a major challenge in Papua New Guinea and this often has a tribal and ethnic, rather than religious, connotation. Certain areas are also plagued by so-called "rascalism" (the local term for street criminality).

Prospects for freedom of religion

In July 2013, Parliament passed a motion to carry out a nationwide consultation on the question of religious freedom to decide whether to prohibit non-Christian religions. At that time, some feared that this would result in intolerance towards other beliefs. In fact, the proposed consultation never took place after the Constitutional Review Commission reported that such a ban would violate religious freedom. The latter is generally respected

in Papua New Guinea, and there is little reason to believe that the situation will deteriorate in the foreseeable future.

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PARAGUAY

RELIGION



- Christians: 95,4%
- Ethnoreligionist: 2%
- Agnostics: 1,8%
- Others: 0,8%



AREA

406.752km²

POPULATION

6.725.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble to the constitution invokes God and reaffirms the principles of a “pluralistic democracy”.¹

Under article 24, “the freedom of religion, of worship, and ideological [freedom] are recognised without any restrictions other than those established in this constitution and in the law.” Under article 82, “the predominant role of the Catholic Church in the historical and cultural formation of the nation is recognised.” However, article 24 specifies that “no religious faith will have official character” and “the relations between the state and the Catholic Church are based on independence, cooperation, and autonomy.” Article 24 also guarantees “the independence and the autonomy of the churches and religious faiths”, without any restrictions other than legal ones.

Also under article 24, “no one may be interfered with, questioned, or forced to give testimony by reason of their beliefs or of their ideology.” Article 46 states: “all the inhabitants of the republic are equal in dignity and rights.” Article 88 condemns religious discrimination against workers.

Article 74 enshrines the “the right to a religious education” and “the right to ideological pluralism”. There is a Deputy Ministry of Worship within the Ministry of Education and Science. The Ministry of Worship functions involve religious education, registering religious organisations and certifying foreign missionaries.² It also monitors freedom of religion and inter-faith dialogue.³

Under articles 197 and 235 of the constitution, ministers of religion cannot run for President, Vice President, or Senator, or become Members of Congress.

Incidents

In December 2016 various Evangelical associations expressed concern that, if a proposed amendment to the constitution to allow presidential re-election was passed, democracy, the rule of law and civil and political freedoms could all be damaged.⁴ In March 2017, the

Catholic Bishops' Conference of Paraguay also spoke out against the re-election, stating it would create tension and polarise society, with the risk of violence breaking out.⁵

In January 2018, in view of the many temples and churches in the cities, the Ministry of Education and Science, through the Deputy Ministry of Worship, introduced a new regulation, in which in order to continue to operate legally, religious groups were required to enrol at an official registry. The aim is to obtain details about religious groups, their belief systems and figures relating to the numbers of followers. Religious institutions already registered were required to update their registration.⁶

In March 2018, as national elections approached, the Association of Evangelical Churches of Paraguay, the Association of Evangelical Pastors of Paraguay called on people to vote in accordance with Biblical principles and the values enshrined in the constitution.⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

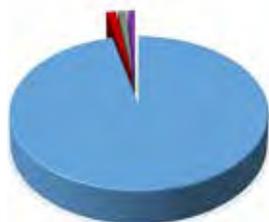
There have been no reports of religious intolerance. Since the last reporting period, the situation of freedom of religion has not changed and the outlook is positive.

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PERU

RELIGION



- Christians: 96,4%
- Ethnoreligionists: 1,4%
- Agnostics: 1,2%
- Others: 1%



AREA	POPULATION
1.285.216km ²	31.774.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble to the constitution invokes “Almighty God”.¹ Under article 2(3), everyone has the right to “freedom of conscience and religion, in an individual or collective manner. No person shall be persecuted on a basis of his ideas or beliefs. There is no crime of opinion. Public exercise of any faith is free, insofar as it does not constitute an offence against morals, or a disturbance of the public order.” Likewise, according to article 2(2), there is a right to “equality before the law” and, with specific reference to freedom of religion, this means that “no one shall be discriminated against on the basis of [...] religion”. Everyone also has, according to article 2(18), the right to keep his religious convictions private.

Under article 50, the state “recognises the Catholic Church as an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral formation of Peru, and lends the church its cooperation.” However, the Church is “independent” from the state and “autonomous”. These provisions echo the agreement signed with the Holy See in July 1980, under which Peru’s Catholic Church enjoys full independence, autonomy and legal recognition. The agreement with the Holy See continued the system of subsidies for the Catholic Church, as well as providing for tax exemptions.² Under article 50 of the constitution, the Peruvian state also “respects other denominations and may establish forms of collaboration with them.”

Under article 14 of the constitution, “religious education is provided in keeping with freedom of conscience” and education more generally is provided “in conformity with constitutional principles”.

Law No. 29.635 on Religious Freedom reiterates and elaborates on some of the constitutional guarantees. There is a fundamental right to freedom of religion. This includes, under article one, the person’s right to practise his or her religion in public or private, provided that it does not interfere with the right of others. According to article two, discrimination on religious grounds is prohibited and the diversity of religious entities is recognised. Freedom of religion includes professing freely one’s chosen religious beliefs; changing or abandoning them at any time; practising them individually or collectively, in public or in private; performing acts of worship; receiving religious assistance; choosing religious and moral education in accordance with one’s convictions; expressing oneself publicly

for religious purposes; celebrating festivities and keeping days of rest that are considered sacred in one's religion; according to article three, taking an oath in accordance with one's own convictions or refraining from doing so; being buried according to the traditions and rites of one's religion. Under article four, the right of conscientious objection is recognised. Under article six, religious entities enjoy civil legal recognition, can appoint their ministers of religion, spread and propagate their faith, and create foundations and associations for religious, educational and social purposes. Article eight states that educational institutions must respect the right of students to be exempt from religious studies. The religious groups included in the registry created by the Ministry of Justice are legal entities governed by private law and have the status of not-for-profit organisations.³

Incidents

In the current reporting period, there have been no significant, reported violations of religious freedom and there are some indications of greater religious tolerance.

In July 2016 the regulations implementing Law No. 29.635 on Religious Freedom were adopted. The Registry of Religious Entities was also established in order to facilitate relations between the state and those entities.⁴

In December 2016 the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, through the Directorate of Inter-confessional Affairs, set up a Working Group on Religious Freedom in Latin America, with the aim of promoting pluralism and freedom of worship.⁵

In February 2017 the Constitutional Court handed down a judgement about Catholic Church property. Even though the property was declared to be part of the cultural heritage of the nation, it was also ruled that it remains private property and the Church is not required to provide information about it.⁶

In February 2017 in a meeting with the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Peru, the Minister of Education noted that the 2017 national basic education curriculum does not envisage reducing the number of hours assigned to religious education.⁷

In April 2017 certain politicians proposed a bill aimed at modifying some articles of the constitution so that it would express more clearly the secular nature of the state.⁸

In June 2017 a bill came before Congress that would make the Immaculate Virgin of the Puerta de Otuzco the patron saint of the La Libertad region. The proposal aimed to encourage and strengthen religious customs and popular devotion to the image of the Virgin, and to reinforce the historical, religious and cultural identity of the region.⁹

To mark the anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, in October 2017, the Peruvian Congress approved a law to make 31st October the "National Day of the Evangelical Christian Churches in Peru".¹⁰

In January 2018 Pope Francis visited Peru and was very well received. In Trujillo, he said a Mass that was attended by nearly a million people from different parts of the country.

In Lima more than 1.5 million people reportedly came to see him. The Pontiff called for hope, equality and solidarity.¹¹

In February 2018 a bill was presented to Congress to amend the Criminal Code so that certain specific verbal attacks on religion and the destruction of places of worship or images would be criminalised as offences against freedom of religion and worship.¹²

In April 2018 the Forum of Indigenous Peoples and the Inter-religious Forum of the Americas were held on the fringes of 8th Summit of the Americas. About 300 representatives of indigenous peoples of Latin America participated. In the inter-religious forum, participants agreed that education must be based on the values of truth, honesty, trust and respect.¹³

Many organisations are active in ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue, including the Inter-religious Council of Peru and CREAS, a regional ecumenical and multi-disciplinary Christian organisation.¹⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

During the period under review no incidents of intolerance were reported. Legal steps are being taken to promote religious freedom. In light of this, the situation of religious freedom has improved and future prospects seem positive.

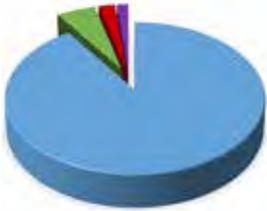
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PHILIPPINES

RELIGION



- Christians: 90,6%
- Muslims: 5,5%
- Ethnoreligionists: 2,3
- Others: 1,6%



AREA

300.000km²

POPULATION

102.250.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Since 1899, the year in which the Philippines became the first democratic republic in Asia, freedom of religion has always been one of the pillars of the different constitutions enacted by the country – even when it was wracked with war or under the rule of a dictatorship. The current constitution, implemented in 1987, is no exception and freedom of religion is enshrined within section 5 of article III (“Bill of Rights”) in the following terms: “No law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, shall forever be allowed. No religious test shall be required for the exercise of civil or political rights.”¹

Moreover, the Philippines does not have a state religion. The preamble of the constitution specifies that the constitution is promulgated by “the sovereign Filipino people” who thereby are “imploing the aid of Almighty God”. While the Catholic Church holds a prominent place within national politics (Catholics make up some 80 percent of the population), this is in no way inscribed within the constitution, which lays down the “inviolable” principle of the separation of Church and state (section 6 of article II of the constitution pertaining to the “Declaration of Principles and State Policies Principles”).

Nonetheless, the constitution does not ignore or disregard religions. For instance, article VI, section 28, paragraph 3 – pursuant to the role of Congress – provides a tax exemption for institutions engaged in “religious, charitable or educational” activities; it is specified that these institutions may be “charitable institutions, churches and parsonages or convents appurtenant thereto, mosques, non-profit cemeteries”. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the strict legal regime of the separation between church and state is highlighted within paragraph 2, Section 29 of the same article VI, where it is written that “no public money or property [of the state]” may be used, directly or indirectly, for the benefit of any “sect, church, denomination, sectarian institution, or system of religion” or for the benefit of any “priest, preacher, minister, or religious teacher, or dignitary as such”; however, the same paragraph 2, Section 29 of that article VI provides for public funding related to chaplaincies within closed environments (such as the armed forces, prisons, or public orphanages).

This lawful system of strict separation between church and state does not violate the educational freedom of parents. Article XIV, section 3, paragraph 3 of the constitution – legal provision focused in particular on education – establishes the right of parents who have their children registered in state schools to receive religious instruction in accordance with their religious affiliation “within the regular [normal] class [school] hours”. The same paragraph 3, section 3 of that article XIV stipulates “without additional cost to the Government.”

A predominantly Christian country, the Philippines has a small Muslim minority, partly concentrated within the large, southern island of Mindanao. The integration of this religious minority, combined with a particular ethnic and cultural affiliation, has been – and remains – a major issue within national politics. The constitution echoes this issue within article X concerning “local government”; it can be read in section 1 of article X that the “Muslim Mindanao” will be endowed with an “autonomous region” – a project which is reiterated in section 15 and section 19 of that same article X. It is also specified that, “within 18 months” following the establishment of the institutions sanctioned by this constitution promulgated in 1987, this autonomy for the Muslim Mindanao was to be implemented, a promise largely unfulfilled since.

In addition, the criminal code severely criminalises any intentional attack on places of worship or religious buildings and such attacks are punishable as war crimes or crimes against humanity. The Philippine judicial system carefully upholds everyone’s religious freedom: in January 2018 the July 2017 decision rendered by the Supreme Court in favour of Denmark Valmores was made public. A member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Valmores felt discriminated against because he had to attend classes and undergo exams on Saturday, the Sabbath day for Seventh-day Adventists. In compliance with Section 5 of the Bill of Rights enshrined within the 1987 constitution, the supreme court judge² ruled in favour of Denmark Valmores.

That being said, relations between religions and the state in the Philippines are not as separate as the constitution stipulates; during the period under examination there have been various confrontations.

Incidents

Rodrigo Duterte, the iconoclastic President of the Philippines, was antagonistic to the Catholic Church, even before his election on 9th May 2016. In early May 2016, he said the Catholic Church was “the most hypocritical institution”. In October of the same year, when the anti-drug campaign was gaining momentum and hundreds had already died during the initiative, the President called the members of the Roman Catholic clergy “sons of bitches” for criticising his actions in this area.³ In December, he declared that the church was “only good at raising money and begging” but that it gave nothing back.⁴

Within this context, it is not surprising that various organisations related to the Catholic Church have found themselves targeted by the government of Philippines. In February

2018, Reporters Without Borders denounced the fact that “for more than a year, the Catholic Media Network, the main radio broadcaster in the country, has been waiting for the renewal of its licence, which was blocked in Congress. Tabled on 24th January 2017 before the Parliamentary Committee in charge of this issue, the request has still not been included in the agenda. While the famous 25-year-old radio broadcasting license expired on 4th August, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, which manages the network, is now concerned that its 54 radio stations will all be closed eventually.”⁵

Pressures have also been exerted on individuals. On 16th April 2018, the Immigration Bureau arrested and detained Sister Patricia Fox, a 71-year-old Australian nun from the Philippine province of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion. The reason invoked for her arrest was her involvement in “illegal political activities”, incompatible with the status of her resident visa in the Philippines. Released the next day, the nun was notified of the order to leave the national territory within thirty days. Redemptorist Priest Oliver Castor, a member of the Philippines Rural Missionary Association, believes the government is trying to “stop the Church’s work with the poor” through Sister Fox’s expulsion.⁶

However, the Catholic Church and the President have been able to find some common ground. The Philippines is the only country on Earth – with the Vatican – to not have legalised divorce. Regularly, bills are presented to the House of Representatives of the Philippines to decriminalise divorce. Each time, the Catholic bishops remind the country that they are opposed to it. On 19th March 2018, the House of Representatives voted (by 134 votes for and 57 against) a law “instituting absolute divorce and dissolution of marriage in the Philippines” (within the Philippines, divorce is possible only for Muslims and religious marriage has the force of law). Before being promulgated by the President, the law must be passed by the Senate, the Upper House of Congress. However, President Duterte, whose first marriage was found null and void, reaffirmed on this occasion that he was against divorce: “for the well-being of the children.” Nevertheless, there are differences between President and the Catholic Church concerning marriage: on 17th December 2017, in Davao, the city where he was the Mayor for 22 years, the President declared that he was in favour of same-sex marriage, “because it’s in tune with the times,” he said. This contrasted with his previous statements where he stated that he was opposed to homosexual marriage.

Despite the inclusion within the constitution of the need to find a political solution to the claim of autonomy of the island of Mindanao, and its Muslim minority, no durable solution has emerged through the various Administrations in power in Manila. The last major crisis was the Marawi siege. On 23rd May 2017, while Mass was celebrated, armed men desecrated and set fire to the cathedral after kidnapping Father Teresito “Chito” Suganob, Vicar General of the Prelature of St Mary in Marawi and rector of the cathedral, as well as 15 parishioners. On the same day, fighters of the Maute group, founded by two brothers from the radicalised region in the Middle East, tried to seize the largest Muslim city within the archipelago. Five months of fighting followed, ending with the defeat of the insurgents.

The death toll was very heavy: more than a thousand died. Nearly 400,000 people were displaced. Even if Father Sukanob was eventually released and the fighting declared over on 23rd October 2017, the crisis weighs upon the peace process within Mindanao. Martial law was introduced throughout the island of Mindanao in May 2017. The zone where fighting occurred remained closed for months to civilians and reconstruction work had barely begun as of May 2018. It was only on Easter Sunday (1st April) 2018, that around 7,000 residents were allowed by the Philippines army to return briefly to their homes. During the course of this long conflict in the south of the Philippines, where the ethnic, economic and political elements are inextricably linked, the religious dimension was obviously present in the will of the jihadists to destroy and desecrate the cathedral of a city where Christians were a minority. Recurring tensions that continue to shake the region: on Sunday, 29th April 2018, a bomb-blast (an attack using explosives) targeted a Catholic Church in Koronadal, a town located 300 km south of Marawi. The bomb exploded after the Sunday Masses, while baptisms were held inside the Catholic building; the explosion did not claim any victims.⁷

The violence present within the Filipino society does not spare members of the Catholic clergy. On 4th December 2017, Father Marcelito Paez, of the Diocese of San Jose, Nueva Ecija was murdered by unidentified killers in Aliaga town in northern Nueva Ecija (north of the country). At the age of 72 years, the Catholic priest recently helped get a political prisoner released.⁸ On 29th April 2018, another Catholic Priest, Father Mark Anthony Yuaga Ventura, 37 years old, was shot twice by a sniper after he celebrated Mass. He belonged to the Archdiocese of Tuguegarao (north of the country) and was known for his commitment to the aboriginal peoples of the region and for his denunciation of the misdeeds committed by the mining companies operating within the region. The President of the Episcopal Conference of the Philippines, Archbishop Romulo Valles, called on the authorities “to act quickly to bring to justice the perpetrators” of these murders.⁹ According to the ecumenical group Promotion of Church People’s Response, Father Ventura is the 32nd pastoral worker to have been murdered since 2000; according to other statistics, he is the 15th Catholic priest to be killed in the Philippines since the 1970s.

Prospects for freedom of religion

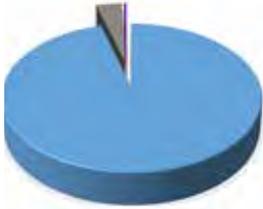
On the international scene, there has been much criticism of Rodrigo Duterte. In February 2018, a report from the American intelligence community (The Worldwide Threat Assessment published by The Office of the Director of National Intelligence) highlighted his “autocratic tendencies”.¹⁰ On the national scene, the debate revolves around the revision of the country’s constitution envisaged by President Duterte. The bishops stated that projected constitutional reform, introduced under the pretext of decentralisation and the introduction of a form of federalism within the archipelago, would have an anti-democratic outcome which would unfavorably impact the poor.¹¹ Since the 1987 constitution symbolises the attachment of Filipinos to democracy after two decades of dictatorship under the rule of Marcos, the stakes are high and there is reason to fear a hardening of the confrontation, for now relatively subdued, between the Catholic Church and the President.

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POLAND

RELIGION



- Christians: 95,7%
- Agnostics: 3,9%
- Others: 0,4%



POLAND

AREA	POPULATION
312.679km ²	38.593.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 53 of the constitution guarantees freedom of religion and conscience in Poland. The article allows public displays of worship, as long as they do not threaten public order, state security or individual freedoms and the rights of others. The same applies to religious education in state schools. “Organs of public authority” may not compel an individual to disclose his or her personal beliefs. And no one may be compelled to participate, or to not participate, in religious activities. Article 48 accords the parents of a child the right to raise it according to their convictions.¹

The preamble of the constitution explicitly mentions God and the Christian heritage of the nation, while at the same time including those who do not believe in God but respect the universal values of truth, justice, good and beauty.² Article 25 further specifies the relationship between the state and religious groups. It guarantees the legal equality of all Churches and religious organisations and the “autonomy and mutual independence” of Church and State, with the possibility of cooperation for the individual and the common good. The same article mentions in 25.4 and 25.5 that the state regulates its relations with the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and other religious organisations through bilateral accords.³

Article 196 of the Penal Code makes it an offence to publicly offend religious feelings.

Incidents

A controversial bill making it illegal to accuse “the Polish nation, or the Polish state, of being responsible or complicit in the Nazi crimes committed by the Third German Reich” was introduced in February 2018. The maximum sentence is a three-year jail term. The legislation was responding to concerns that the Polish authorities have been accused of formally collaborating with the Nazis in setting up concentration camps like Aushwitz, where millions of Jews died. Israel, the US and France condemned the law, and an open letter from the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland claimed that since the bill was announced there has been a “growing wave of intolerance, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism”

which has included threats to members of the Jewish community. The Polish Catholic Bishops' Conference also condemned growing anti-Semitism in the country.⁵

Michael Bilewicz, the director of the Centre for Research on Prejudice at the University of Warsaw, stated that the amount of anti-Semitic material on the internet increased vastly in the wake of the Holocaust Bill, peaking around January 2018. Since then it has subsided again.⁶ An article in the *The Times of Israel* featured a report about the ongoing Jewish revival in Poland. While it also described how internet hate speech had peaked, it added that Jews generally feel very secure, suffering relatively few attacks, especially when compared with the hundreds of assaults in Western countries such as France.⁷

On 3rd November 2016, the night after All Soul's Day, unknown perpetrators vandalised a graveyard in the city of Elk. Over 100 Christian graves were reported as destroyed or damaged. Police are still investigating the case. In August 2017 they detained a suspect, but he was released through lack of evidence.

On 8th February 2017 in the city of Kapino at least two men brutally assaulted a Catholic priest as he was returning from an evening Church service. The priest endured about six hours of physical torture. The perpetrators stole his money and car. The police later detained three suspects, two men and one woman. The case is currently under investigation.⁹

The Polish organisation *Ordo Iuris* is cataloguing cases where the religious feelings of Christians have been offended or hate crimes based on religious grounds have occurred. Their collection of data is then transmitted to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) for a report on hate crimes. This report is published by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The 2016 report contained 19 cases of attacks against Christian property, three against Jewish property and five cases of anti-Muslim violence on clearly religious, as opposed to, racist grounds.¹⁰ The latest submission by *Ordo Iuris* for the next ODIHR report covering 2017 counts some 34 cases where vandalism or desecration has occurred or where Christians have had their religious feelings offended. It includes among other incidents the damaging of a figure of Jesus Christ in Gdansk in January, the desecration of the tomb of a priest in the city of Rawa Mazowiecka in February, the destruction of the facade of an Evangelical Chapel in Biała Piska in August, "birthday party" celebrations by three high school students which involved vandalising graves in Zbrosławice in September, the destruction of a plaque commemorating the victims of the 2010 Smolensk Catastrophe in Gdynia in October, a parody of the Lord's Prayer on RMF FM Radio meant as criticism of the right-wing government, and the theft of a small figurine of Jesus from a Christmas nativity scene in Gdansk in December. Most of these cases are currently under Police investigation, seven have been resolved so far. For example in the case of the the Evangelical Chapel in Biała Piska, the perpetrators were fined 4000PLN and made to pay with court costs. The fine was used for repairs to the damaged facade.¹¹

There have been several instances of religious feelings being insulted by artists and activists. Often this is part of their protest against the current right-wing government.¹² One example was an exhibition of paintings by Piotr Jakubczak, whose caricatures of

right-wing politicians incorporated religious symbols, e.g. an image of MP Jarosław Kaczyński crucified and dressed only in boxer shorts.¹³ Probably the most notorious case was a theatre-play called *Curse* by the playwright Oliver Frlić. It depicted a sexual act during which a cross was profaned and a figure representing Pope John Paul II engaging in sexual acts. During an interview featured in the liberal newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* an employee of the Institute of Theatre described the play as “liberating” in the face of the “molestation” committed by the Catholic Church. Below the web version of the article several anonymous anti-Catholic comments were posted, which the paper did not remove.¹⁴ The musical *Kinky Boots* also caused controversy for featuring a drag queen making fun of Mary Magdalene.¹⁵

As in other European countries, anti-Muslim sentiments increased in the wake of the refugee crisis. During a Far Right march on Polish Independence Day on 11th November 2017 some held up a large banner which depicted a Trojan horse labelled “Islam” with a hook-nosed terrorist inside.¹⁶

Prospects for freedom of religion

Because of the low number of Muslim or Jewish immigrants in Poland, the numbers of violent incidents directed against people from these religious groups remains low, unlike in neighbouring Germany or Ukraine. Religious intolerance and hate speech on the internet, however, have increased over the last two years. Poland is increasingly divided politically and culturally, with a very complex pattern of conflicts which tend to associate political views with religiosity. The ruling right-wing government is pro-Christian, often anti-Muslim and nominally pro-Jewish. Yet the rift over the proposed Holocaust Bill has harmed relations with Jews. Fringe, far right groups, representing comparatively few people, are very visible in the mainstream media and very active on social media. They accuse the right-wing government of not being hard enough on Muslim refugees and of being pro-Jewish. Activists and artists drawn to the liberal opposition attack the staunchly pro-Catholic governing party by targeting the Catholic faith. Internet hate speech is present across all political spectrums.

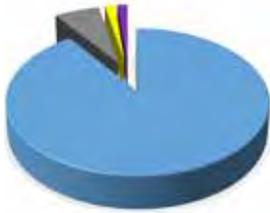
With the ruling right-wing government being ideologically at odds with some other Western states and the liberal media, one has to be aware of potentially biased reports. Extreme cases are *The Times of Israel* falsely attributing to the president of Israel Reuven Rivlin a public utterance that Poland is complicit in the Holocaust¹⁷ and the US Congressman Ro Khanna accusing the Polish state of passing laws glorifying Nazi collaborators and denying the Holocaust.¹⁸ Yet, while the actions and intentions of the government are open to interpretation, the rising tide of hate speech on the internet and public insults in the society are not. So far, abuses have been reported by the victims and investigated by the authorities, so we are still at the level of “intolerance”, and access to justice remains firmly in place.

Endnotes

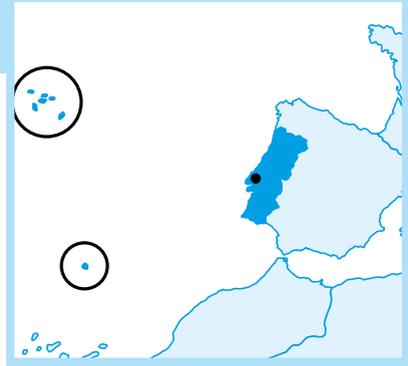
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PORTUGAL

RELIGION



- Christians: 90,3%
- Agnostics: 6,7%
- Atheists: 1,5%
- Others: 1,5%



PORTUGAL

AREA	POPULATION
92.226 km ²	10.304.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Portugal's constitution upholds the right to religious freedom, declaring that no one should be "persecuted, deprived of rights" because of their faith. However, the constitution also adds that no one should be exempt from "civic obligations or duties because of their religious convictions or practice". The constitution guarantees "the freedom to teach any religion practised... and the use of media to pursue religious activities". The right to conscientious objection is also guaranteed under the constitution. Article 41 requires the separation of Church and state. Relations between the Portuguese state and the Catholic Church are regulated by the Concordat of 18th May 2004. Relations with other religious faiths are governed by Religious Freedom Law no. 16/2001. Article 45 of the law allows for the state to enter into agreements with Churches and other religious communities in Portugal.

According to current legislation, minority faith groups based in Portugal may, like Catholics, celebrate religious marriages with civil effects. No Church or other religious group is funded by the state. That said, the state may support the construction of churches and, on occasion, of non-Catholic places of worship, as well as social and welfare works. In certain situations, faith groups are eligible to some tax benefits. Under article 52 of Law no. 16/2001, the Religious Freedom Commission (CLR) was created to monitor the application of the Religious Freedom Law.

Incidents

In June 2016, members of the Christian Inspired Press Association (AIC) met Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. AIC chairman Father Elísio Assunção told the president of his "concern and indignation" at the State's Regulatory Entity for Social Communication, which he said discriminated against Christian publications.¹

In July 2016, the public television channel changed the pre-arranged schedules of Catholic programmes to broadcast the Tour de France live. The religious programmes in question – 'The Faith of Men', 'Paths' and '70x7' – were broadcast at different times during the two

weeks of the sporting event. Article 25 of the Religious Freedom Law guarantees “a broadcasting time” to the “Church and other registered religious communities.”²

In August 2016, the parishes of Beja reported “a wave of unprecedented robberies” targeting churches and priests’ property. In a statement quoted by the Ecclesia Agency, the local diocese described the situation as “alarming” and that “an assessment of the damage” was needed. Among the parishes targeted were Almodôvar, Castro Verde, Mértola, Odemira and Ourique and São João Baptista, the most well-attended parish in the city of Beja.³ The report did not investigate whether burglaries involving non-Church property had risen over the same period. The motive for the attacks was unclear.

Also in August 2016, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Portugal claimed that the Concordat with the Holy See was being flouted in connection with government demands regarding Church payment of the IMI property tax. Father Manuel Barbosa, secretary and spokesman of the bishops’ conference said: “Article 26 of the agreement between the Holy See and the Portuguese State, the Concordat, is not being respected. They are charging undue IMI to parishes and parish homes. These situations are regrettable.”⁴ Dozens of parishes in the country received notifications from the Ministry of Finance to pay IMI for assets and facilities used for social purposes. The bishops’ conference added that it would ask the state to explain the apparent change regarding tax demands.⁵ In response, the Ministry of Finance issued a clarification on IMI exemptions within the scope of the Concordat, noting that the provisions “have not undergone any change recently”. By the end of the month, the Portuguese tax authorities had asked parishes to pay municipal tax on the buildings that were previously exempt.⁶

Five senior members of the Portuguese Medical Association signed a letter in October 2016 opposing the legalisation of euthanasia, stating that the practice of “taking [of a] life” goes against the profession’s ethical standards.⁷ In May 2018, the country’s parliament rejected plans to legalise euthanasia. The media reported that the Portuguese Medical Association opposed the change, saying it violated key principles of the medical profession.⁸

Also in October 2016, the Mayor of Gondomar, Marco Martins, from the Metropolitan Area of Oporto, stated that “more than 20 religious processions have changed course this year in order not to pay... fees and charges”. He said: “Just [for a procession] to cross the road the celebration committee has to pay €200 plus VAT and if it travels on the national road it pays €500.”⁹ The mayor stressed that the tax impacted unfairly on religious processions across the region, but acknowledged that the rates also applied to other entities. Local politician Hermínio Loureiro described these fees as an “injustice”. The company enforcing the charges stated that it was complying with the law.

In November 2016, the Department of Historic and Artistic Heritage of the Diocese of Beja and the Union of Parishes of Serpa reported an attack on the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The heritage department stated that the shrine was “severely vandalised [by a] group of bandits [who]...kicked and used iron rods and sticks as levers to destroy walls and ornamental structures, among them some urns of baroque inspiration, from the churchyard”.¹⁰

Meeting in Fatima in January 2017, Portuguese Catholic bishops declared their objection to the topic of abortion being covered in classes of children as young as 11 (fifth and sixth grades). The bishops also “reaffirmed the right of parents to the education of their children” and that “sex education must be... [part of the] integral education in the growth of the personality of the person.”¹¹

In January 2017, there was renewed controversy relating to Portugal’s Concordat with the Holy See. Although the chairman of the Religious Freedom Commission, Vera Jardim, the former justice minister, did not directly suggest repealing the Concordat, he said relations between the Catholic Church and the state should be regulated by the same law that applies to other religions. He also argued that classes on Catholicism should be dropped in favour of civic education. Up to four months previously, Vera Jardim had chaired the Religious Freedom Committee, an advisory body to the Government and Parliament, which is responsible for alerting the authorities to violations of religious freedom. In this interview, he said the Catholic Church had benefited in comparison to other religions but said this reflected the prominent place of Catholicism in society.¹²

In March 2017, parents reportedly objected to Easter Mass being held during school hours at a public school. The students of Alfândega da Fé School rehearsed Catholic songs in music classes for an Easter Mass, due to be held later. The case was thought not to be unique. A media report stated that other “specific situations” were confirmed by the president of the Association of Directors. Also, the Portuguese Atheist Association was reported to have already received complaints from some “heads of education about the existence of unauthorised religious practices in public schools.”¹³

In November 2017, the Church of Our Lady of Loreto in Lisbon was vandalised just after restoration work lasting seven months had been completed. At 4am on a Sunday, scaffolding outside the church was set alight. The flames blackened parts of the church wall. The case was investigated by the police. The authorities are reported to suspect arson. Rubbish bins in the region were also set on fire at about the same time as the attack on the church. In a statement published on ‘The Crow’ website, parishioner Giuseppe Maria Negri also suspected that the fire was deliberate. He said: “We regret it, of course. The case was handed over to the authorities. But we cannot say anything else.”¹⁴

At dawn one morning in March 2018, the Blessed Sacrament was desecrated during Eucharistic Adoration at the Church of São Tiago in the Diocese of Coimbra. Father Orlando Henriques, editor of the weekly ‘The Friend of the People’, referred to sources connected with worshipers who claimed that criminals took the monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament.¹⁵ Reports also describe a robbery at the church, suggesting that there were financial motives for the attack as well as religious ones.

In April 2018 there were reports that a poor family had been made homeless after the parish church of Salvador de Paço de Sousa in Penafiel, was required to pay the IMI property tax. The church was required to rent one of the 13 “houses of the poor” built by Father Américo to cover the tax.¹⁶

In May 2018, Father Manuel Barbosa, secretary and spokesman for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Portugal said Parliament's vote to reject bills legalising euthanasia "is a victory of life in all its meaning, of life that should never be put to the vote with a view to its elimination". He said the bishops' conference "welcomes the disapproval of the legalisation of euthanasia in Parliament" and [other] numerous institutions" in the defence of life. "It is a victory for democracy and for all those who have committed themselves to defending life... We also recognise the active role that all Christian communities and their pastors have had in this process of defending life through prayer and awareness."¹⁷

Prospects for religious freedom

In the period under review, there were no significant cases of discrimination on religious grounds or abuses of religious freedom that could be attributed to the state or other entities. One important issue was the question of whether the buildings belonging to the Catholic Church should remain exempt from IMI (Municipal Property Tax). No social, economic or political developments are expected in the near future that may change this situation. Although there appears to have been an increase in violent incidents involving Church property, the motives remained unclear, with financial gain as well as religious hatred being suggested as underlying reasons for the attacks.

Some events during this period suggest that the issue of religious freedom or persecution of Christian communities is gaining a – more positive – prominent role. An example of how this fundamental human right gained profile in the two years under review is that the Portuguese office of Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) was invited three times to participate in Parliamentary committees. This indicates the growing importance that Parliament attaches to these issues and greater recognition of the work carried out in the country by religious groups and charities.

Another example of the growing recognition of religious freedom came in October 2016 when more than 70 MPs from all parties delivered a letter to the Pakistan embassy in Lisbon asking for the liberation of Asia Bibi. In their letter, the MPs said "religious freedom [should benefit] everyone," as should the defence of other fundamental human rights.

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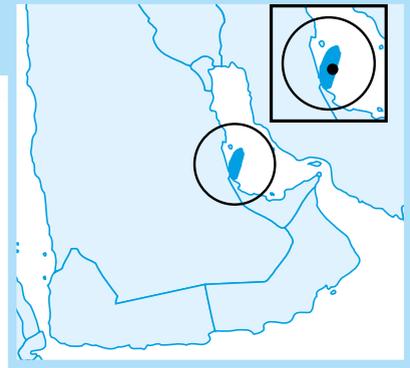
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QATAR

RELIGION



● Muslims: 83,8%
● Christians: 9,2%
● Hindus: 2,5%
● Agnostics: 2,4%
● Buddhists: 1,9%
● Others: 0,2%



AREA	POPULATION
11.607km ²	2.291.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Qatar is a hereditary monarchy ruled by the Emirs of the Al Thani dynasty. The country is very rich in natural gas and oil and is thus, by per capita income, one of the richest in the world. All its citizens are Muslims, including the ruling family. The Wahhabi form of Sunni Islam predominates and Shia are in the minority. Of the entire population, Qataris with full citizenship are only around 10 percent. The remainder are residents who are mostly guest workers. Most of the non-Qataris are either Sunni or Shia Muslims but there are also Hindus, Christians and Buddhists.

The local Catholic Church estimates the number of Catholics to be up to 300,000. Other Christian groups such as Anglicans and Orthodox number less than five percent among non-citizens.

The eight registered Christian denominations are permitted to hold group worship at a government-provided area on the outskirts of Doha, on land donated by the Emir. Before this area was established, Catholics used to pray and worship in makeshift 'chapels' – homes and, in one case, a school. Following the Iranian Revolution, the practice of non-Islamic religions was prohibited in Qatar. Finally, in 1995, freedom of worship was granted. That freedom is limited to the Abrahamic faiths only, i.e. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Non-Abrahamic faiths cannot register establish places of worship. The state tolerates their adherents praying in private homes.

Apostates from Islam do so at great risk and have to conceal their new religious beliefs. The Christian human rights organisation Open Doors states: "[Apostates] risk being ostracised by their families and communities, physical violence or even honour killing if their faith is discovered."¹ Most Qatari Muslims convert to Christianity abroad and never return for fear of their safety.

According to Article 1 of the constitution, "Islam is [Qatar's] Religion, and the Islamic Law is the main source of its legislations". Article 35 states that "people are equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination against them because of sex, race, language, or religion." Article 50 reads as follows: "The freedom to worship is guaranteed to all, according to the law and the requirements to protect the public order and public morals."

Qatar's Law 11, of 2004, incorporated the traditional punishments of Islamic law for various offences, including apostasy. Article 1 of the law states that: "the provisions of Islamic law for the following offences are applied if the defendant or victim is a Muslim: 1. The hudud offences related to theft, banditry, adultery, defamation, alcohol consumption, and apostasy. 2. The offences of retaliation (qisas) and blood money (diyah)." While apostasy is one of the offences subject to the death penalty, Qatar has not executed anyone for this offence since its independence in 1971. Qatar also criminalises proselytising. Under article 257, any individual who establishes an organisation in order to proselytise may be punished with a term of imprisonment of up to seven years.²

Blasphemy against Islam, Christianity or Judaism is punishable by up to seven years in prison.³

Incidents

According to the Catholic Church's Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, "the current Emir has been praised for his religious tolerance and support of inter-religious dialogue, despite keeping a firm eye on Islamic law"⁴ This tallies with earlier descriptions provided by state officials. In a speech delivered in March 2015 in Geneva at the 28th session of the Human Rights Council dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on religion or belief, Sheikh Khalid bin Jassim Al -Thani, the Director of the Human Rights Department at Qatar's Foreign Ministry, said: "The State of Qatar has confirmed its guarantee of freedom of religion or belief of non-Muslims by establishing buildings for worship such as the Religious Complex, widely known as 'Church City'. It also confirmed that it had strengthened the constitutional protection of freedom of religion or belief through adopting several related legislations and the establishment of many institutions at both government and non-governmental level, including Doha International Centre for interfaith dialogue which was set up in 2008, with the aim of promoting and spreading the culture of dialogue, acceptance of others and peaceful coexistence of different religions." He added that the State of Qatar had continued hosting international conferences and fora on human rights issues and the promotion of a culture of peace, including an annual Conference on interfaith dialogue.⁵

Following directives from the government, churches at the Mesaimmer Religious Complex stepped up safety measures in July 2015 by closing off gated parking, introducing metal detectors and increasing the number of security guards.⁶ There were thousands of people for Christmas services at the Complex in December 2016.⁷

Qatar's mosques were used in the past as platforms by hard-line clerics. One notorious incident took place in March 2015, when Saudi cleric Sa'ad Ateeq al Ateeq preached in the Grand mosque in Doha and prayed for the destruction of a number of non-Muslim groups: "Allah, strengthen Islam and the Muslims, and destroy your enemies, the enemies of the religion. Allah, destroy the Jews and whoever made them Jews, and destroy the Christians and Alawites and the Shias."⁸ There has not been a recurrence of this kind of attack since then.

Some 615 expats in Qatar became Muslim during the month of Ramadan 2017, according to the Qatar News Agency, which cited figures released by the Qatar Guest Centre and the Sheikh Eid Charity Association. Qatar regularly announces conversions to Islam, which can number in the thousands each year. The conversions may be encouraged by easy access to information about the state religion but some groups have suggested that they may also be motivated by social and economic benefits.⁹

In June 2016, Qatar's foreign minister, Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, reiterated the Qatari government's rejection of all forms of violent extremism and its support for the international community's commitment to tackle it. Speaking at a conference on children affected by extremism, held at the UN headquarters in New York, he said extremism was not rooted in religion but social, economic and political factors. According to the Gulf Times, Sheikh Mohamed "underlined the role of religious figures who preached tolerance and humanitarian values as well as the role of civil society organisations and intellectuals in spreading a spirit of forgiveness and tolerance and searching for compromises rather than imposing opinions on others."¹⁰

In October 2017, a two-day conference was held at the Doha Institute for Higher Studies.¹¹ University professors, political scientists, researchers and writers who took part in the meeting focused on the violence that pushes Christians out of the region. They talked especially about Egypt and Iraq. Participants agreed that democracy and the rule of law could be used to redefine the role of religion in the region. The main conclusions were that the lack of civil rights in the Arab world does not only have an impact on religious minorities but also affects the Muslim majority. Furthermore, it was clearly stated that, rather than stressing religious differences, shared values should be promoted. "One cannot simply separate Christians from the rest of the Arab region," said Azmi Bishara. He added that "equal citizenship and democracy" were the only real solution.

In February 2018, the 13th Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue themed "Religions and Human Rights"¹² was attended by Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders, alongside academics and other specialists in interfaith relations. Speakers called for "the implementation of religious values in the divine religions and to strengthen international laws to protect human rights and to stop violations, whether the perpetrators are the states, individuals or groups." Furthermore, Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh Al Nuaimi, Chairman of the DICID, stressed the need to find "effective international mechanisms to guarantee freedom of belief and practice of religious rites, as well as the need to respect religious sanctities, customs and traditions of all peoples."¹³

Prospects for freedom of religion

Qatar remains a highly conservative Muslim country with restrictions of religious freedom at both a state and societal levels. There are also many radical Muslims. That said, members of registered religious groups are able to worship without interference. The approved construction of an Evangelical church is a positive sign. Worship by members of non-registered groups was tolerated.

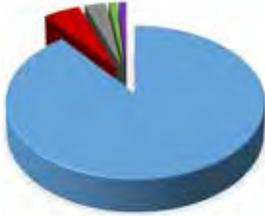
Qatar has been accused of collusion with Iran, and of financing the Muslim Brotherhood and terrorist groups. The political and diplomatic crisis that happened in June 2017 between a coalition of Arab countries (led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and including Bahrain and Egypt) isolated Qatar.

Endnotes

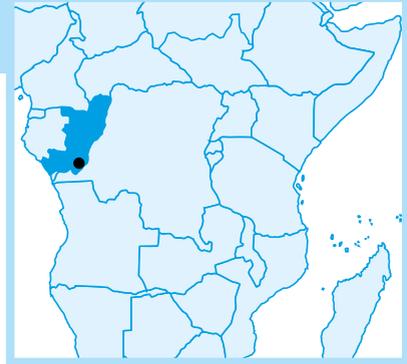
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REPUBLIC OF CONGO

RELIGION



● Christians: 89,5%
● Ethnoreligionists: 5,2%
● Agnostics: 3,0%
● Muslims: 1,2%
● Others: 1,1%



AREA	POPULATION
342.000km ²	4.741.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Republic of Congo adopted a new constitution on 6th November 2015. Article 1 sets out the secular character of the state. Under article 8, all kinds of discrimination, including discrimination on religious grounds, are forbidden. Article 24 provides that freedom of conscience and freedom of belief are guaranteed. The same article states that “the use of religion for political goals is prohibited”, and that “any kind of religious fanaticism shall be punished”.¹

All religious groups must register and receive approval from the government. There were no reports of discrimination against any religious group which attempted to register, although there were some complaints that the process was time-consuming. Failure to register may result in a fine, the group’s property being confiscated, its contracts with third parties being cancelled and its expatriate personnel being deported.

The Republic of Congo has a Muslim minority which has grown steadily over the last few years. Many of them are migrant workers from West African countries. Since 2014, there has also been an influx of several thousand Muslims from the Central African Republic who have come as refugees.

Individuals are banned from wearing the full-face Islamic veil (including the niqab and the burqa) in public places according to a decree which carries the force of law. This decree also prevents Muslims from foreign countries from spending the night in mosques. The Government states that these measures guard against terrorist acts.²

Public schools do not include religion education as a subject in their curricula. However, private schools are free to provide religious instruction.

The government often facilitates the use of public buildings for both Christian and Muslim religious ceremonies. For instance, in August 2017, an Evangelical church held a conference in the grounds of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and inside the Parliament building in Brazzaville.

The following religious festivals are public holidays: Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, All Saints and Christmas. Muslim religious festivals are not national holidays, but Muslims are given leave to celebrate their main festivals, such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Kebir.

Incidents

A joint report by the UN and the Congolese government stated that a government-led security operation on 5th April 2017 caused serious damage to a Pentecostal Church in Soumouna, a village in the southern Pool region. The church is run by Pastor Ntumi (Frederic Bintsamou), whose followers believe he has mystical powers. It was alleged that he was commander of the “Ninja/Nsiloulou” rebel group which was in conflict with the government during the 1997–2003 civil war. The government claimed that Pastor Ntumi and former militia were behind 4th April 2017 raids on military, police and local government offices in Brazzaville. Six weeks later, a decree was issued by the Minister of the Interior and Decentralisation which banned the activities of Pastor Ntumi’s church claiming the church was harbouring armed militia and represented a major security threat.³ On 22nd December 2017 Pastor Ntumi’s followers signed a peace accord with the government.

During the period under review, there were no reports of religiously motivated incidents or actions directed against any community because of their religious affiliation. Generally, religious groups were free to carry out their acts of public worship and other activities without any hindrance. Across the country, there is peaceful co-existence between people of different denominations.⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

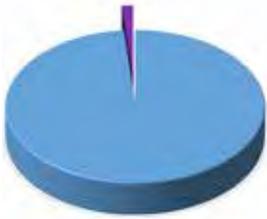
The Republic of Congo seems likely to continue upholding the right to religious freedom during the next few years. Although tensions between Christians and the growing Muslim minority are sometimes reported, particularly in Pointe-Noire, so far these reports indicate that frictions between people from different origins can be managed without any serious incidents. Respect for religious freedom, including that of religious minorities, is likely to continue.

Endnotes

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ROMANIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 98,5%
- Others: 1.5%



AREA	POPULATION
238.391km ²	19.373.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 29 of the constitution¹ proscribes any restrictions on freedom of thought, opinion, conscience, and religious beliefs. It also prohibits forcing individuals to espouse a religious belief contrary to their convictions. It stipulates that all religions are independent from the state and are free to organise “in accordance with their own statutes” under terms defined by the law. The constitution also states that religious denominations shall be autonomous and enjoy state support, including help to facilitate religious assistance in the army, hospitals, penitentiaries, retirement homes, and orphanages.

The country classifies religious communities as either denominations, religious associations, or religious groups. This is set out in article 5 of the 2007 Law on the Freedom of Religion and the General Status of Denominations.² While the first two are legal entities, the third is not. Religious groups, as defined by the law in article 6, are groups of persons who share the same beliefs. Religious associations are defined in article 40 as groups of at least 300 citizens, which have attained a legal status through the registration with the Registry of Religious Associations. The minimum membership requirement for registration of nonreligious associations is three. Religious associations do not receive government funding but get limited tax exemptions. After 12 years of continuous activity and a membership of at least 0.1 percent of the population, a religious association might apply to become a state-recognised denomination, as specified in article 18. This enables it to receive state support.

According to the US International Report on Religious Freedom, 2015 legislation expanded “prohibitions against religiously motivated incitement to hatred and against fascist, Legionnaire,³ racist, or xenophobic organisations, which it defines in part as a group that promotes violence, religiously motivated hatred, and antisemitism”⁴

Incidents

As in previous years, non-Orthodox groups reported problems obtaining the return of previously confiscated properties. The Romanian Greek Catholic Church, in particular,

was unable to obtain the restitution of many of its churches and other properties. At the same time, Greek Catholic priests continued to complain that local authorities were not granting them construction permits for places of worship, even though there were no apparent legal grounds for refusing.

Greek Catholic priests reported that at a local level, particularly in rural areas, Russian Orthodox Church priests have harassed and intimidated Greek Catholics and encouraged members of their congregations to do likewise. ROC priests have denied Greek Catholics access to cemeteries and churches. In areas including Filea de Jos, Morlaca, Valisoara, and Csaba in Cluj County, they had to organise their services in spaces such as schools or a building on a former Communist farm, since the former Greek Catholic churches had not been returned and the ROC refused to allow them the use of ROC-controlled buildings. Despite authorities, including the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs of the problem, being informed of such issues they have not enforced the law in these areas.⁵

Some members of the ROC remain very hostile to ecumenism and rapprochement with the Catholic and Protestant Churches. There have been protests and at least one notable petition against the decree on the Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World issued by the Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete in June 2016.⁶ At the same time, the Pew Research Center reported that a majority (62 percent) of the population in Romania favours the reunification of the Eastern and Western Churches.⁷

The Elie Wiesel Institute continued to urge authorities to enforce existing legislation against anti-Semitism. There were instances of print and online publications, blogs, and personal websites which published anti-Semitic articles. The nationalist ideas of the Iron Guard were promoted by neo-fascist organisations. On 23rd October 2016, an anti-Semitic article titled 'How the Judeo-Masonic Elite Destroys the Romanian Nation' was published by the New Right, an extremist group known for speaking out against non-Orthodox religious communities. The Elie Wiesel Institute reported that the use of social media to promote anti-Semitism has increased of late.⁸

In April 2017, some graves in a Jewish cemetery in Giurgiuului, in the south of Bucharest were vandalised, on the night before Holocaust Remembrance Day. The perpetrators were very young, teenagers or even children, according to the police. Maximilian Marco Katz, the founder of the Center for Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism in Romania, accused the government of not enforcing its own law against anti-Semitism (from 2015). According to him acts and statements hostile to Jews are often not punished sufficiently, and there has been no real improvement in public awareness of the problem. While most Romanians do not deny the Holocaust, some do not believe that Romanians collaborated with the German Nazi perpetrators.⁹

In February 2018 the Romanian National Council for Combating Discrimination made public an EU-funded project and partnership with 'Accept', an NGO which campaigns against what it calls "the abusive usage of religious freedom that generates intolerance against minorities".¹⁰ Anghel Buturuga, an editor for Active News, stated that this NGO

actively threatens religious freedom in Romania. At the same time, a petition signed by three million citizens to hold a referendum on family values is being ignored by the government.¹¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

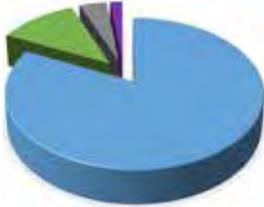
While the authorities have enacted some measures against anti-Semitism, the law is currently not being enforced enough, according to some experts. Hostility against Jews, especially in social media, remains high.

Another ongoing problem is the hostility of some ROC members against non-Orthodox believers, mainly against the Greek Catholic minority. While religious freedom is not being significantly threatened in Romania, there is currently no real improvement either.

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RELIGION



- Christians: 82,2%
- Muslims: 11,8%
- Agnostics: 4,1%
- Others: 1,9%



AREA	POPULATION
17.098.246km ²	143.440.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Russian constitution of 12th December 1993¹ declares in articles 14 and 28 that the Russian Federation is a secular state which guarantees freedom of religion or belief: Article 14 (1) states: “The Russian Federation shall be a secular state. No religion may be established as the State religion or as obligatory.” Article 14 (2) states: “Religious associations shall be separate from the State and shall be equal before the law.” Article 28 states: “Everyone shall be guaranteed freedom of conscience and religion, including the right to profess individually or collectively any religion or not to profess any religion, and freely to choose, possess and disseminate religious and other convictions and act in accordance with them.”²

Article 19 guarantees the equality of rights regardless of religion or beliefs adding “all forms of human rights on social, racial, national, linguistic or religious grounds shall be prohibited”.

Article 29 states that “propaganda or agitation which arouses social, racial, national or religious hatred and hostility shall be prohibited” and that propagating supremacy is forbidden on the same grounds.

Article 30 asserts that “everyone shall have the right to association”.

The 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Association³ (with amendments through to 2016) serves as the main pillar of the religious legislation.

The law recognises four “traditional religions” (the Russian Orthodox Church, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism). For practical purposes, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church are generally treated as traditional Russian religions, being invited to participate in official events. The law stresses the special role of the Russian Orthodox Church because of its historical contribution to the country’s spirituality and culture.⁴

The law establishes several categories of religious entities: Religious Groups (RGs), Local Religious Organisations (LROs) and Centralised Religious Organisations (CROs).

De facto religious groups (RGs) have the right to conduct religious rituals and ceremonies, hold worship services, and teach religious doctrines. They are not registered with the government and have therefore no legal personality. They cannot open a bank account, build, buy or rent premises or publish or import religious material.

In order to be recognised as a Local Religious Organisation (LRO), a religious group must prove that it has existed as such for at least 15 years.⁵ It must consist of no less than 10 persons over the age of 18 that permanently reside in a given area. It is registered at both the federal and the local level. An LRO can open a bank account, buy and own or rent buildings for religious purposes, acquire, import, export and disseminate religious literature, enjoy tax and other benefits, and so on. Additionally, they can also create local religious organisations as affiliates without any waiting period.⁶

Centralised Religious Organisations (CROs) must consist of no less than three LROs to be eligible for registration.⁷ They enjoy the same rights as LROs. After 50 years of existence and activity in the country, they can include the word ‘Russia(n)’ in their official title.⁸

In November 2015, the 1997 Law was amended to require religious organisations that receive foreign funding to report their activities, leadership, and budget plans to the Justice Ministry. Under this amendment, the Justice Ministry and related bodies have the right to inspect religious organisations’ financial activities if they receive foreign funding, or if there is concern of “extremism”, or unlawful activity, without any prior warning.⁹

The 2002 Law On Countering Extremist Activity¹⁰ grants the authorities the power to censor religious freedom and expression and to criminalise a broad spectrum of religious activities.¹¹

Article 13 of this law provides for the establishment of a federal list of banned extremist materials. Since any court may add materials to the federal list, a judicial ban on a particular item in one city or region on the grounds that it has been found ‘extremist’ can be enforced across the country.¹²

An opinion issued by the Venice Commission at its 91st Plenary Session, dated 15th - 16th June 2012, stated that the manner in which the Extremism Law is pursued is problematic:

In the Commission’s view, the Extremism Law, on account of its broad and imprecise wording, particularly insofar as the “basic notions” defined by the Law – such as the definition of “extremism”, “extremist actions”, “extremist organisations” or “extremist materials” – are concerned, gives too wide discretion in its interpretation and application, thus leading to arbitrariness.¹³

and the Venice Commission added:

[...] the activities defined by the Law as extremist and enabling the authorities to issue preventive and corrective measures do not all contain an element of violence and are not all defined with sufficient precision to allow an individual to regulate his or her conduct or the activities of an organisation so as to avoid the application of such measures. Where definitions are lacking the necessary precision, a law such as the Extremism Law... can be interpreted in harmful ways. The assurances of the authorities that the negative effects

would be avoided thanks to the guidelines of the Supreme Court, the interpretation of the Russian Institute for Legislation and Comparative Law or good faith are not sufficient to satisfy the relevant international requirements.¹⁴

Other laws:

In 2013, a law was enacted, imposing a maximum three-year prison sentence and/or the confiscation of up to three years' salary for "offending religious convictions and feelings".¹⁵

In May 2015, a law on foreign agents came into force that banned foreign and international organisations which allegedly present a threat to constitutional order or state security. While the law is aimed at NGOs, its vague wording makes it applicable to religious organisations as well.¹⁶

In July 2016, amendments, known as the Yarovaya Law, increased restrictions for religion under anti-extremism laws. Under these amendments, "missionary activities" have been redefined and forbid preaching, praying, disseminating materials, and answering questions about religion outside designated locations.¹⁷ Under this legislation, Russians must obtain a government permit through a registered religious organisation in order to share their beliefs through missionary activities. Such restrictions also apply to activities in private residences and online.¹⁸

Those found guilty of violating the anti-evangelism law face fines of up to US\$780 for an individual, and up to US\$15,500 for a group or organisation. Foreign nationals who violate this law may be deported.¹⁹

Furthermore, the Yarovaya Law states that foreign missionaries must prove that they have been invited by a state-registered religious organisation and may only operate in the regions where their organisations are registered.²⁰

The North Caucasus

In Dagestan and Chechnya, the local government has been draconian. In these areas security forces have orchestrated the forced disappearance of those suspected of practicing "non-traditional" Islam. Russia's anti-extremism legislation is not often used in the North Caucasus. In Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kremlin-appointed regional leader, imposes his own views of Islam, requiring all women to wear Islamic dress. Furthermore, forced and polygamous marriages are not punishable by law.²¹

Peaceful Muslim dissidents and innocent bystanders with no connection to politics have been targeted in the region.²²

Crimea

After Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, Russia imposed its laws on the peninsula and religious organisations in Crimea were required to re-register under Russian law. Many of them had to restructure themselves to meet the new requirements; including cutting ties with fellow-believers in Ukraine. Under the Yarovaya law, Christians and other religious groups experienced raids, fines, literature seizures, government surveillance, etc.²³

In 2016, Forum 18 recorded 13 cases in Crimea against individuals on charges relating to missionary activities, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants and a Muslim. Individuals were fined amounts equivalent to approximately 10 days' average local wages. Fourteen other cases were brought forth against seven religious communities and seven individuals for failing to indicate the official name of a registered religious community. Eight cases resulted in fines of between 30,000 – 50,000 Russian Rubles (between US\$500 - 830).²⁴

All 22 registered Jehovah's Witness communities in Crimea were liquidated and their property seized.²⁵

Greek-Catholic Churches from Ukraine and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches (Kiev Patriarchate) were deemed "persona non grata" in Russian Crimea and were ultimately forced to leave the area. Currently, Orthodoxy is exclusively represented by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Incidents

Related to Jehovah's Witnesses

On 20th April 2017, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation banned the Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses and all 395 LROs on grounds of "extremism". Since that decision, Jehovah's Witnesses have faced arrests, imprisonment, discrimination and mistreatment. Prayer meetings in private homes have been interrupted and raided; witnesses have been dismissed from their jobs, interrogated and prosecuted. A number of their properties and buildings have been vandalised and even destroyed.²⁶

On 25th May 2017 Danish national and EU citizen, Dennis Christensen was arrested by armed officers from the Federal Security Service during a raid on a private worship service being held by Jehovah's Witnesses. Christensen was the first Jehovah's Witness to be detained following the ban of the religious group.²⁷ One year later, he was still in pre-trial detention.

In August 2017 the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures was declared an extremist publication.²⁸

As of May 2018 over 20 criminal cases had been opened against Jehovah's Witnesses, seven of them were in pre-trial detention, and two were sentenced to house arrest.²⁹ All could face possible prison sentences of up to ten years for meeting for worship. In addition to the criminal cases, around 90-100 properties belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses have been confiscated by the Russian state based on court decisions, and an additional 100 properties are currently in court proceedings. The Russian authorities have also threatened to deprive Jehovah's Witnesses of parental rights.³⁰

In May 2018, the delegations of the European Union and the United States to the OSCE issued statements condemning the harsh policy of repression targeting Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.³¹

Related to Protestants

Protestants are mainly targeted for proselytism on the basis of the anti-missionary Varo-
vaya laws.

On 23rd November 2016 a local prosecutor's office conducted an inspection of the Sal-
vation Army in Vladivostok. A case was opened on the grounds that the organisation
"in its missionary activity uses and distributes literature and printed materials without
identifying labels of the religious organisation". On 20th December 2016, the Salvation
Army of Vladivostok was found guilty of having religious literature, including 36 copies
of the Bible and collections of religious songs in the worship hall, that did not identify
the name of the denomination. The decision concerning destruction of the Bibles evoked
such a great public outcry that the decision was appealed. On 30th December 2016, the
magistrate's order was amended: the section about destruction of the confiscated items
was removed but the rest of the order remained unchanged. The case was eventually
dismissed by the Constitutional Court.³²

Indian-born Protestant pastor Victor-Immanuel Mani, who is married to a Russian and has
a Russian-born child, was the first foreigner to receive a deportation order under Admi-
nistrative Code Article 5.26, Part 5 ('Foreigners conducting missionary activity'). On 20th
December 2016, Naberezhnyye Chelny City Court found him guilty of advertising religious
gatherings on social media and allegedly giving religious literature to a non-member of
his Church. He was also fined 30,000 Roubles (US\$480).³³

In early 2018 an unnamed Baptist, a Russian citizen, was found in violation of anti-evan-
gelism laws after he had organised evangelistic activities in his apartment without having
registered with the authorities. He also had reportedly distributed religious literature to
persons outside of his religious group. He was ultimately found guilty and fined 6,000
Roubles (c.US\$100).³⁴

On 16th May 2018 Nosisa Shiba, a final-year student at Nizhny Novgorod Medical Academy,
who is also a citizen of Swaziland (Africa), was charged on the basis of article 18.8, part
4 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law of the Russian Federation. The young
woman, who has been a Protestant since childhood, began attending an Evangelical
church in Nizhny Novgorod upon her arrival in Russia. A video of Shiba singing about
God and his love for people in her church was found on YouTube by the Federal Security
Service. The court ruled that she be fined 7,000 Roubles (c.US\$110) and deported after
the completion of her studies.³⁵

Related to Muslims - Said Nursi followers

As of May 2018 four members of the banned Muslim movement Nurdzhular were in pri-
son, two in pre-trial detention and two have been sentenced for being involved in the
activities of a banned organisation: Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev (in pre-trial detention since
April 2017), Ziyavdin Dapayev (in pre-trial detention since March 2016), Bagir Kazikhanov
(sentenced to three years and six months) and Yevgeny Lvovich Kim (sentenced to three
years and nine months).³⁶

Related to Hindus

In 2018 Hindus continued to face discrimination and harassment from anti-cult activists, in particular from Alexander Dvorkin. Dvorkin is the vice-president of the France-based European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism (FECRIS), which receives funding from French public institutions. The activities of Dvorkin are suspected to have led to physical assaults to the group's members and leaders, including the November 2017 raid on the home and spiritual centre of Hindu leader Shri Prakash Ji.³⁷

Related to Other Minorities

On 6th June 2017, Sakhiliev, Ivan Matsitskiy, Galina Shurinova, and Anastasia Terenteva, members of the Church of Scientology, were arrested in St Petersburg. They were accused of participating in an extremist organisation, running an illegal business, inciting hatred, and violation of human dignity. They were charged with violating article 171 of the criminal code, which prohibits unregistered commercial activities, and under articles 282 and 282.1, which prohibits participation in extremist organisations or carrying out related activities. As of May 2018, they were still in pre-trial detention.³⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

The situation of religious freedom has worsened in the last two years and there is no sign that this trend will come to an end or slow down in the near future.

The 1997 Law as well as the ideological stances and policies which were thereafter adopted by Russian authorities were all inspired by the desire to ensure the "spiritual security" of Russia, a new concept expressing the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in safeguarding "national values".

In the National Security Concept Presidential Decree No 24 of 10th January 2000,³⁹ the administration stated: "Ensuring the national security of the Russian Federation also includes protection of the cultural, spiritual and moral legacy, historical traditions and the norms of social life, the preservation of the cultural wealth of all the peoples of Russia [...] along with counteraction against the negative influence of foreign religious organisations and missionaries."

This concept explains the religious cleansing that is now being carried out and gaining momentum.

Despite the negative opinion of the Venice Commission, laws against extremism and about missionary activities have been amended in such a vague way that members of non-Orthodox religious communities and non-mainline Muslim communities of foreign origin can easily be prosecuted and sentenced for the legitimate and peaceful exercise of their religious freedom. The ban of Jehovah's Witnesses, the confiscation of all their property in the country and the imprisonment of their members – a first since the collapse of the Soviet Union – sends a strong signal to other minority religious movements competing with the Russian Orthodox Church and mainstream Islam.

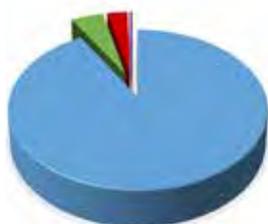
A positive element that can be highlighted is the common view shared by Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia that they need to unite their efforts for the protection of and assistance to Christians in the Middle East.

Endnotes

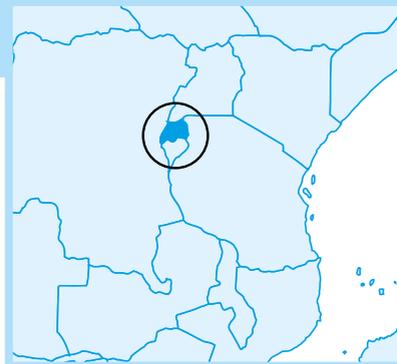
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RELIGION



- Christians: 91,6%
- Muslims: 4,9%
- Ethnreligionists: 3,1%
- Others: 0,4%



AREA	POPULATION
26.338km ²	12.802.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution of Rwanda, promulgated in 2003 and most recently amended in 2015, states, in article 37: “Freedom of thought, conscience, religion, worship and public manifestation thereof is guaranteed by the state in accordance with the law.”¹ Article 57 prohibits the setting up of political organisations that are based “on race, ethnic group, tribe, lineage, region, sex, religion or any other division which may lead to discrimination”.

Under the new Penal Code of May 2012,² disrupting a religious service (article 277) is punishable by between eight days and three months in prison and fines of between 20,000 and 300,000 Rwandan francs. The Penal Code also imposes fines on anyone who “publicly humiliates rites, symbols or objects of religion” (article 278), or insults, threatens or physically assaults a religious leader (article 279). Government policy allows individuals to express their religious (but not ethnic) identity through choice of headdress in official photos for passports, driver’s licences, and other official documents.

Under a new law governing religious groups, promulgated in 2012 (Law 06/2012, published in the Official Journal of the Republic of Rwanda), all groups “whose members share the same beliefs, cult, and practice” must register with the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) to acquire legal status. Unregistered groups need permission to organise religious activities. This is not required for religious groups which are already registered.³ According to a number of religious leaders who were consulted (Catholic, Protestant and Muslim), there are no restrictions for officially recognised religious groups carrying out pastoral activities, catechising, building places of worship, owning and running media (particularly radios) and fundraising inside and outside the country.

All students in public primary school and the first three years of secondary education must take a religion class that covers various religions. Parents can enrol their children in private religious schools.

The law covering religious groups does not include non-governmental organisations (NGOs) associated with religious groups. Domestic NGOs associated with religious groups are required to register with the RGB, but under a different law governing NGOs. The law

details a multi-step NGO registration process and requires annual financial and activity reports and action plans.

The government only recognises civil marriages.

Incidents

In July 2017 a Rwandan citizen by the name of Marerimana Herman filed a lawsuit against Archbishop Thaddée Ntihinyurwa of Kigali, charging him with alleged criminal offences: being the head of an organisation which supposedly suppressed Rwanda's traditional religion, and recognising the Marian apparitions in Kibeho. He claimed this contravened article 36 of the Rwandan constitution, which recognises "the right to promote [the] National Culture".⁴ The court accepted to hear the case.⁵ This incident prompted widespread concern among Catholics. Some religious and lay leaders privately described the accusations as strange and unusual, suggesting that some political interests might be behind Mr Marerimana's action. Finally, after hearing the archbishop's lawyers, the court decided to dismiss the case.⁶

There were more tensions between the Catholic Church and the government in mid-December 2017 after the authorities announced a plan to distribute condoms to young women. It formed part of a campaign launched by the Ministry of Health aimed at reducing the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases. Catholic Bishop Servilien Nzakamwita of Byumba reacted by describing the campaign as "a licence for teenagers to fornicate" and as responsible for the increase in pregnancies. Rwanda's Minister of Health, Diane Gashumba, responded by saying that the bishop's statement was completely out of context and that it showed a lack of understanding as regards the health problem the Government was trying to address.⁷ Notwithstanding this, no government authority seems to have tried to prevent religious leaders and members of the clergy from discussing their religious ideas in public.

In January 2017, it was reported that the Rwanda National Police (RNP) shot and killed an imam who was in custody in Kigali. In August of the same year, four other Muslims were shot dead by RNP officers in Bugarama. In both cases, the police said that they were suspected of having links to Islamic terrorist groups.⁸

In late February 2018, it was reported that about 700 small Pentecostal churches were closed down. The authorities said that they had failed to comply with building and noise pollution regulations. Reportedly, some of them were reopened after they were approved by inspectors.⁹

Prospects for freedom of religion

After President Paul Kagame's visit to the Vatican on 20th March 2017, high-ranking government officials showed restraint in speaking about the Catholic Church over its alleged role in the 1994 genocide. During the meeting, Pope Francis "conveyed his profound sadness,

and that of the Holy See and of the Church, for the genocide against the Tutsi.” He cited Pope John Paul II who, at the beginning of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, “implored anew God’s forgiveness for the sins and failings of the Church and its members, among whom priests, and religious men and women who succumbed to hatred and violence, betraying their own evangelical mission.”¹⁰

During the reporting period, it was observed that freedom of worship and freedom to carry out educational and social activities by religious groups were generally respected. Incidents involving Muslims appeared to be linked to concerns over international terrorist groups rather than attacks against the Islamic faith per se. These developments, coupled with what appears to be a less confrontational approach towards the Catholic Church, suggest that during the period under review the prospects for religious freedom in the country improved. This trend is likely to continue in the coming years.

Endnotes

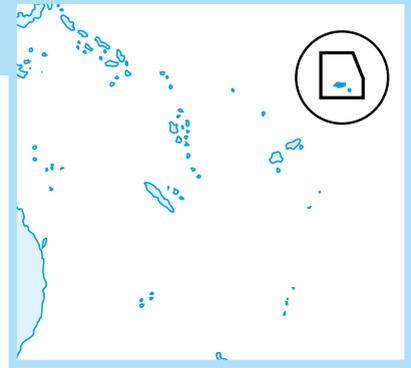
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SAMOA

RELIGION



- Christians: 98,8%
- Others: 1,2%



AREA

2.842km²

POPULATION

195.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Samoa is made up of two main islands – Upolu and Savai'i – and eight small islets. The capital, Apia, is situated on Upolu.

Under Article 11 of the constitution, “every person has the right to freedom of religion”.¹ This right includes “the freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and, in public or private, to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance”. These rights may be qualified by law, if such a law imposes “reasonable restrictions [. . .] in the interests of national security or of public order, health or morals, or for protecting the rights and freedom of others”. There is also legislation to prevent discrimination on the grounds of religion by public or private bodies.

Samoa is an overwhelmingly Christian country. According to the 2011 census, Congregationalists are the largest Protestant denomination making up 31.8 percent of the population. Catholics are 19.4 percent, Methodists are 13.7 percent, the Assembly of God are 8 percent, and Mormons, 15.2 percent. There are also smaller Christian denominations. There are reportedly a number of Buddhists, Baha'is, Jews and Hindus. There is also a small Muslim community and one mosque.

In June 2017, the Samoan Parliament passed the Constitution Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2016.² The Explanatory Memorandum states that “the object of the Bill is to insert in the Constitution that Samoa is a Christian nation to declare the dominance of Christianity in Samoa” by adding a new article, 1(3). The constitution's preamble states that “Samoa should be an independent state based on Christian principles”, but the Prime Minister stated that the amendment was necessary because the preamble lacked legal force. The Attorney-General stated that the amendment “will enshrine Christianity from within the body of the constitution which effectively provides a legal definition of the state's religion”.³ He also underlined that the individual's rights guaranteed under Article 11 (Freedom of Religion) remained “untouched”. There are no government policies or procedures which call this assertion into question.

Under the constitution, no one at an educational institution is required to receive religious instruction or participate in worship in a religion other than his or her own. Religious communities have the right to establish their own schools and provide religious instruction. Christian instruction is compulsory for in public primary schools but optional in public secondary schools.⁴

Religious groups are not required to register with the state but may register as charities. Registration provides legal personhood and attracts tax exemptions. Unregistered groups cannot corporately buy property or have employees.

Incidents

The amendment of the constitution has been understood by some as an attack on religious freedom. This inference may have been drawn because of other statements by prominent public figures. For example, in May 2016 the secretary general of the Samoa Council of Churches was quoted as saying that he wished to ban Islam from the islands.⁵ Samoa's chief Imam, Imam Mohammed Bin Yahya's expressed his concerns on behalf of the small Muslim community facing such hostility. However, no examples of actual religious discrimination against or persecution of non-Christians by public authorities have been reported.

Traditionally, villages in Samoa have tended to have one Christian church, although larger villages have churches of different denominations without apparent conflict. The matai councils (the traditional leadership within villages) have been reported to be resistant sometimes to the emergence of new Churches within their communities.⁶ There are also reports of the successful implantation of such Churches after initial difficulties.⁷

A new tax on the income of ministers of religion came into effect on 1st January 2018. The legislation takes the form of an amendment to the Income Tax Act 2012. The Prime Minister has stressed that the tax does not affect the income of Church bodies, but the income of individual pastors.⁸ Some ministers of religion have vigorously opposed the scheme and portrayed it as an attack on religion; others have accepted it in principle but stressed that the taxation must have the right purpose. There has been a public discussion for some time in Samoa about the financial contributions that members of congregations make to support Church projects and Church leaders, and this is relevant background to the dispute about income tax.

Prospects for freedom of religion

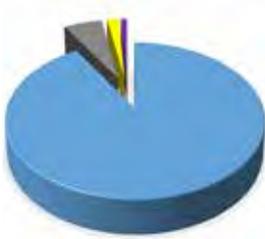
There is nothing to indicate that the constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion will be diminished in the foreseeable future. However, changes to taxation with respect to Church ministers and to the constitutional status of Christianity has occurred in a context of public debate that has unsettled some people.

Endnotes

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SAN MARINO

RELIGION



- Christians: 91,5%
- Agnostics: 5,8%
- Atheists: 1,8%
- Others: 0,9%



AREA
61km²

POPULATION
32.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Republic of San Marino does not have a written constitution. The legal provisions ensuring religious freedom are contained in various pieces of legislation, the most important of which is the Declaration of Citizen Rights (1974) (as amended). Article 5 of the Declaration provides: "Everyone is equal before the law, with no distinction of personal, economic, social, political and religious status."¹ Article 6 states: "Everybody shall enjoy civil and political freedoms in the Republic. In particular, personal freedoms, freedom of residence, establishment and expatriation, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of thought, conscience and religion shall be guaranteed."²

There is no established religion, but Catholicism is the largest religion and it is common to see religious symbols such as crucifixes in courtrooms and other public spaces. In 2009, following the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights that crucifixes should not be displayed in classrooms, the Government rejected the left-wing party Sinistra Unita's request to remove crucifixes from schools.³

The state supports the Catholic Church through income tax revenue. Taxpayers may request that 0.3 percent of their income tax payments be allocated to the Catholic Church or to other charities, including other religious groups.⁴

There are many agreements between the Republic of San Marino and the Holy See. Besides the 1931 Monetary Convention, there is the 1989 Agreement on Religious Festivities and the 1992 Concordat that covers, among other matters, the position of Catholic chaplains in hospitals, retirement homes and prisons.

There are no private religious schools. Catholic religious education is provided but is non-compulsory in public schools. During the reporting period, some people pressed for Catholic religious instruction in public schools to be stopped and be replaced by secular classes.⁵

There are about 200 Jehovah Witnesses who are registered as an association. They are free to practise their faith but, according to the 2018 Report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses are registered in

this way, rather than as a religion, “leads to the application of administrative rules specific to companies/firms which are ill-suited to religious practice.”⁶ The same applies to the rules applied to the local Islamic community. Therefore, the ECRI has proposed that it would be useful to establish “a consultative body for promoting a regular dialogue between the state and minority religious communities, in order to examine the practical problems that religious practice can create and to propose measures to solve them.”⁷

Incidents

During the reporting period, there was a debate on religious education in public schools. San Marino’s political system allows individual citizens to present bills through the so-called “Instances of Arengo” mechanism. Three of these presented in October 2016 were about Catholic education in schools. The first (instance No 5) demanded that education in the Catholic faith in public schools be stopped. In the place of Catholic religious education, citizens asked the government to provide students with alternative secular classes (instance No 6). Finally, they asked the local Church to pay the costs of Catholic religious education, including teachers’ salaries and pensions (instance No 7). The three instances were discussed and rejected on 21st February 2017, but the government has now decided to review the religious education system. On 26th April 2017, the Secretariat of State for Foreign Affairs sent a note to the Holy See asking for a dialogue on the matter. The request was accepted on May 2017. The points to be reviewed include the curriculum and the selection of the teachers, who will probably have to participate in open competition instead of being chosen by the Curia, as they currently are.⁸

In 2016, the local Muslim community established a Muslim association called Al-Nur. This community conducts prayers in premises in a shopping centre in a small town called Gualdicciolo. During Ramadan in 2016, Al-Nur had to temporarily leave the premises, because they had no permit to use the space as a place of worship. Instead, they found hospitality in premises offered by private individuals and by the Catholic Church.⁹

Another positive sign of inter-religious co-operation was the fact that 15,000 Muslims attended Mass on 31st July 2016 to show their solidarity with the local Christian community after the brutal murder by Islamists of French priest Father Jacques Hamel, who was killed on 26th July 2016 while celebrating Mass.¹⁰

Prospects for freedom of religion

There were no significant cases of religious intolerance during the reporting period. Inter-faith relationships are good and, since 2016, a forum for inter-religious dialogue has brought together representatives of different religions to promote mutual understanding.¹¹

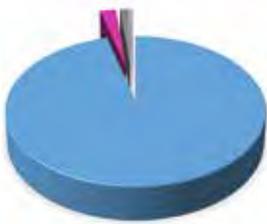
The government will have to take careful decisions regarding the next steps for religious educations in public schools. There are no reasons to forecast that the situation of religious freedom will change in the near future.

Endnotes

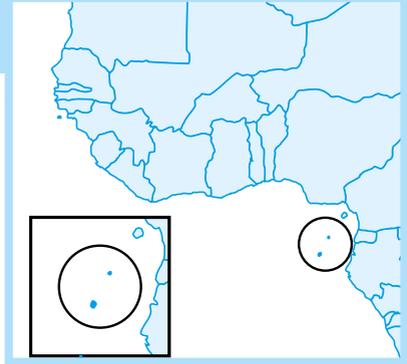
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SAO TOME PRINCIPE

RELIGION



- Christians: 96%
- Baha'is: 2,4%
- Agnostics: 1,4%
- Others: 0,2%



AREA

964 km²

POPULATION

194.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe consists of two archipelagos around the two main islands in the Gulf of Guinea, off the western equatorial coast of Central Africa.

The country saw cycles of social unrest and economic insecurity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries before independence from Portugal was achieved peacefully in 1975. The second smallest African country after the Seychelles, São Tomé and Príncipe remains one of Africa's most stable and democratic countries. The Portuguese legacy is visible in the country's culture and customs which combine African and European influences.

Under the constitution, the Republic is a secular state. The state is separate "with respect to all religious institutions".¹ All citizens are equal before the law, regardless of their religious beliefs. Religious freedom is an "inviolable" and "fundamental" right and Article 26 provides that religious groups are "free in worship, in education and in their organisation". No one may be persecuted on account of his or her religion. However, it should also be noted that "no one may be [...] exempted from civic obligations or duties because of his convictions or practice of religion."

Under the constitution, the meaning of "religious freedom" in the country is to be "interpreted and integrated" in harmony with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Restrictions are permissible only insofar as they are "foreseen in the Constitution and suspended during the validity of a state of siege or state of emergency declared in the terms of the constitution and of the law". In practice, the government respects religious freedom.

There are no official statistics for religious demographics and estimates vary wildly. According to the Association of Religion Data Archives, "it is estimated that 72 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, and 23 percent Protestant. Protestantism has grown considerably in recent years due to missionary activities. The number of Muslims has increased due to an influx of illegal immigrants from Nigeria and Cameroon."² According to the Catholic Bishop's Office, more than 85 percent of the population is Catholic. There are no mosques or madrassas in the country.

Some Christian and Muslim citizens adopt aspects of indigenous beliefs derived from the religions of African coastal societies. Religious brotherhoods led by native priests organise religious festivals in honour of the patron saints of towns and parishes and many people travel to attend such ceremonies. As a result of this mix of culture and religions, for many Catholics, whilst baptisms and funerals carefully follow Catholic rituals, other sacraments are not widely celebrated.

Under Article 30, the state cannot 'reserve for itself the right to plan education and culture according to any philosophical, political, ideological or religious policies'. The country has to a certain extent struggled with the provision of education, but there are no indications that education is provided in a way that is discriminatory on the grounds of religious belief.

Religious groups must register in order to be recognised by the government. After completing the necessary formalities, the registration of the group is published in the Official Gazette. The group may then operate without special governmental restrictions. Registration confers the same tax benefits as not-for-profit organisations. Failure to register may result in a fine and, and in the case of foreign religious groups, possible deportation. There were no reports of the government refusing to register a religious group. Catholic and protestant missionaries are active in the country.

The only religious feast day that is observed as a national holiday is Christmas Day.

Incidents

There were no significant incidents of state or non-state actions that affected religious freedom in the period under review.

Prospects for freedom of religion

The status of religious freedom in São Tomé and Príncipe is expected to remain stable in the foreseeable future. There are generally amicable relationships between different religions.

Endnotes

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SAUDI ARABIA

RELIGION



- Muslims: 92,1%
- Christians: 4,3%
- Hindus: 2%
- Others: 1,6%



AREA	POPULATION
2.206.714km ²	32.158.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who has been King of Saudi Arabia since 2015, is both head of state and head of government. The Kingdom bases its legitimacy on its interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic law) and the 1992 Basic Law of Governance. Under the late King Abdullah (2005-15), the country gradually modernised. With about 20 percent of the world's known oil reserves, the country is one of the wealthiest in the region and a leading power in the Arab world.

In recent years, demands for political reform have increased along with calls for social change, such as the right of women to drive and freedom of expression. In 2016, the Saudi government adopted ambitious economic reforms: Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Programme 2020 to reduce dependence on oil revenues.¹

More than 30 percent of the country's resident population is foreign-born,² mostly Christians, Buddhists and Hindus.³ An unofficial census published by the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia estimates that Saudi Arabia's Catholics number 1.5 million,⁴ mainly foreign workers from India and the Philippines. Some reports indicate a growing number of Saudis identifying as atheists⁵ or Christians.⁶ But, as a result of harsh social and legal consequences for leaving Islam, they keep quiet about their conversion.⁷ The Kingdom does not have official diplomatic ties with the Holy See.⁸

Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam and home to its two holiest sites – Mecca and Medina – with the Saudi king serving as the official Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. According to the Basic Law, the Qur'an and the Sunna serve as the country's constitution.⁹ While the law is based on the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, the interpretations of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, upon whose teachings Wahhabism is based, are also highly influential. The term Wahhabism is not used inside Saudi Arabia, but some would argue that the form of Islam practised in the country is best characterised as Wahhabism. The country follows a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam, including restrictions on women and harsh penalties for a range of crimes, including capital punishment (beheading) for minors. Saudi citizens must be Muslims. Non-Muslims must convert to Islam to be

eligible for naturalisation. Children born to Muslim fathers are deemed to be Muslim. It is prohibited to publicly promote non-official Islamic teachings.¹⁰

Religious freedom is neither recognised nor protected. Conversion from Islam to another religion is considered apostasy, which is legally punishable by death, as is blasphemy against Sunni Islam. Importing and distributing non-Islamic religious materials is illegal as is proselytism for both Saudi nationals and foreigners.¹¹ Non-Muslim places of worship and the public expression of non-Muslim creeds are prohibited. Failure to comply can mean discrimination, harassment and detention. Non-citizens may be deported. Despite government statements that non-Muslims who are not converts from Islam can practise their religion privately, the lack of clear rules has left believers at the mercy of local police.¹²

Religious instruction based on the official interpretation of Islam is mandatory for state schools. Separate curricula for private schools are prohibited. Non-Muslim students in private schools receive mandatory classes on Islamic civilisation.¹³

Despite government policy against non-Muslim burial in the Kingdom, at least one public, non-Islamic cemetery exists according to a US report.¹⁴ Non-Muslim clerics are not allowed in the country.¹⁵

Defendants must be treated equally in accordance with Shari'a. Of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence, the Hanbali school predominates as the basis for interpreting Islamic law. There is no comprehensive written penal code. Rulings and sentences vary widely from case to case.¹⁶

Human rights are not protected. During the period under review, there were frequent reports of restrictions on free speech. No laws or regulations ban discrimination in employment and occupation based on religion as well as other grounds (race, sex, gender identity).¹⁷

The semi-autonomous Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) monitors public behaviour, reporting to police to enforce a strict Wahhabi interpretation of Islamic norms. Since 2016, the CPVPV members have to carry official identification papers, and their powers have been significantly limited by royal decree. Both Muslims and non-Muslims have reported less harassment and fewer raids.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs has intensified its efforts against extremist Islamic preaching through video surveillance of mosques and close monitoring of Facebook and Twitter.¹⁸

Incidents

According to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, Saudi Arabia "continues to prosecute, imprison, and flog individuals for dissent, apostasy, blasphemy, and sorcery".¹⁹ Like other Muslim nations, apostasy is a capital offence.

Minority Shias continued to suffer social, legal, economic and political discrimination and are significantly under-represented in public sector roles. The authorities have responded to the situation with anti-discrimination courses for law enforcement agencies at the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue.

In 2016, the Saudi government announced plans to turn Awamiya, the hometown of Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, into a commercial zone. This has been perceived as an attempt to displace the largely Shia population. Although UN experts called on the government to protect city's old district because of its historic mosques and prayer halls (huseiniyas), demolition started in May 2017. Thousands of residents who were displaced received financial compensation.²⁰

In April 2016, Saudi Arabia decided to restrain its often-criticised Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. Its members are no longer allowed to detain people and must "carry out the duties of encouraging virtue and forbidding vice by advising kindly and gently".²¹ Sheikh Ahmed Al Ghamdi, former head of Mecca's religious police, said that "it was a very good change" for its roughly 5,000 members. Al Ghamdi added that unfortunately some officers working for the commission²² had misunderstood Islam, which is a "very kind" religion.

Seen by some as a step towards modernising the country, these changes are perceived by others as sidelining the arch-conservatives who have traditionally been the pillar supporting the royal family. With opposition to reform muted by the Kingdom's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, some analysts see the reforms as superficial and cosmetic, meant to consolidate the latter's power and authority and change the international community's perception of Saudi Arabia, without really changing its deeply rooted conservatism.²³

In November 2017 the government upgraded its the Penal Law for Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing, which criminalises showing the king and crown prince "in any way that brings religion and justice into disrepute".²⁴

Officials at the Ideological Warfare Centre, a Ministry of Defence-affiliated body launched by Mohammed bin Salman to combat extremist ideology, acknowledged in December 2017 different religious interpretations of punishment for apostasy. Nevertheless, Saudi authorities insisted that apostasy remains an offence against the country's Basic Law.²⁵

In March 2018, the Crown Prince declared that the abaya (a usually black robe worn by women) was not compulsory, according to Islamic teachings.²⁶ In an interview, he told Norah O'Donnell of CBS: "We have extremists who forbid mixing between the two sexes and are unable to differentiate between a man and a woman alone together, and their being together in a workplace. Many of those ideas contradict the way of life during the time of the Prophet and the Caliphs. This is the real example and the true model [of Islam]."²⁷ This provoked a buzz on social media.

During this period, Saudi officials increased contact with Christian Churches. In November 2017, Cardinal Bechara el-Rahi, head of Lebanon's Maronite community, made an unprecedented official visit to Saudi Arabia where he met with Saudi King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.²⁸ This was the first such invitation (originally made in 2013)²⁹ to a senior Maronite official, the first visit by a cardinal, and the first visit by an Eastern patriarch since that of Greek Orthodox Patriarch Elias IV of Antioch in 1975.³⁰ Although the trip was mainly political in nature,³¹ the fact that it happened at all in a country where public expression of faith is forbidden for non-Muslims and where Christian symbols and churches

are banned, was seen as a sign of openness. In particular, many observers noted that at the official meetings the religious leaders wore their vestments and their gold crosses.³²

A few days later, an official Saudi delegation headed by Dr Abdullah Bin Fahd al-Luhaidan, Adviser to Minister of Islamic Affairs, Call and Guidance, met with Pope Francis at the Vatican.³³ The visit itself was set up to thank the Pope for his calls for peace and coexistence, as well as his rejection of any link between religion and terrorism, and his support for dialogue and peaceful coexistence between religions and cultures.³⁴

In early March 2018, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman made an historic visit to Saint Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo, Egypt, where he met Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadros II in what many saw as another sign of openness.³⁵

That same month, the Crown Prince met with the Archbishop of Canterbury during his visit to the UK. The leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion, the Most Rev Justin Welby, and Mohammed bin Salman discussed Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 development plan.³⁶

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, head of the Vatican's Council for Interreligious Dialogue, made an official trip to Riyadh in April 2018 where he met with high-ranking Saudi officials, as well as King Salman. The visit raised hopes of greater religious openness in the Kingdom. For the Saudi monarch, it was his first meeting with a Catholic Church official. In an unprecedented declaration, the cardinal said that "[...] all religions are faced with two dangers: terrorism and ignorance", adding that "Christians and non-Muslims are spoken of well in schools and that they are never considered second-class citizens."³⁷ In light of social changes and the Vision 2030 agenda, the Crown Prince promised to promote interfaith dialogue as part of the country's reforms. For his part, Cardinal Tauran said that "the new generation can really help 'change gears'".³⁸

The cardinal's visit coincided with the anniversary of the inauguration of Rome's first mosque in 1995, that took place with the Vatican's blessing. The late Pope John Paul II noted in a speech at the time that "following an event as significant as this one, one must unfortunately point out that in some Islamic countries similar signs of recognition for religious liberty are lacking. On the threshold of the third millennium the world is awaiting those signs."³⁹

Despite these signs of openness, the crackdown on activists is still happening. For example, the conviction of Saudi blogger Raif Badawi for various crimes including apostasy and "insulting Islam through electronic channels" was upheld in March 2017. In 2014 he was sentenced to 10 years in prison, 1,000 lashes, and a fine of one million Saudi riyals (US\$266,000).

During the period under review, raids and arrests for witchcraft and sorcery continued, mostly among foreign workers from Africa or Southeast Asia accused of using such practices against their employers. Foreign workers were also accused of fomenting disorder in Saudi society and distorting scriptures.⁴⁰ Such offences are punishable by death. The CPVPV has special units to combat sorcery and witchcraft. In December 2017, a special event was held in Mecca at the Grand Mosque to train CPVPV members to identify witchcraft materials.⁴¹

A group of UN experts, including the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, issued a statement in January 2018 in which they condemned arbitrary detentions and urged Saudi authorities to release people detained for “peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association and belief”.⁴²

Prospects for freedom of religion

Apart from the one expression of Islam legitimised by the state, there is a comprehensive repression of religious life in Saudi Arabia. The above-mentioned incidents show that the country has so far failed to make significant changes.

Under the late King Abdullah, the country’s religious principles became more flexible and the power of the religious police was restricted for a while. Abdullah also reached out to non-Muslim religious leaders including Pope Benedict XVI and established an inter-faith centre in Vienna. Under the current ruler, King Salman, efforts to halt extremist influences have been made but ultra-conservative Salafist Islam, which some would simply describe as Wahhabism, remains the only religion allowed.

Despite some encouraging signs of openness, Saudi Arabia is still responsible for “systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom”⁴³ and remains a country of great concern with respect to religious freedom and human rights. Numerous human rights activists and advocates of reforms have been arrested and imprisoned, but some optimistic Western observers highlight the few changes implemented so far, appearing to support the authoritarian methods of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. In general, public opposition to the prince’s reforms has been muted because of an important crackdown on dissent,⁴⁴ including the arrest of prominent clerics with millions of followers on social media.

Endnotes

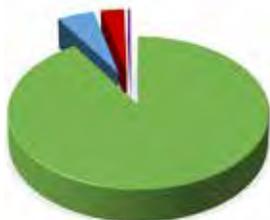
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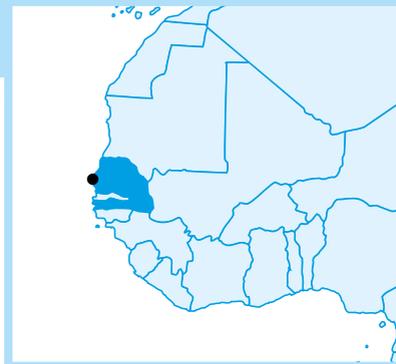
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RELIGION



● Muslims: 91,1%
● Christians: 5,2%
● Ethnoreligionists: 3,3%
● Others: 0,4%



AREA	POPULATION
196.712km ²	15.589.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 1 of the constitution of Senegal establishes a clear separation between the state and religious organisations.¹ Article 24 guarantees religious communities the right to practise their religions freely and the right to manage and organise themselves.²

Islam is the predominant religion.³ Most Muslims belong to Sufi brotherhoods concentrated in the northern part of the country, while most Christians, and Catholics in particular, live in the south-western part of Senegal. (During French colonialisation in the 19th century, Catholic missionary work was confined to these regions, as Islam had not yet prevailed there. The aim was to maintain social peace).⁴ There are also some Protestants. Many Muslims and Christians mix their customs with traditional African rites. Most adherents of traditional African religions can be found in the south-east of the country.⁵

Daily life in Senegal is traditionally characterised by a spirit of tolerance. In matters of family law, Muslims have the right to choose between Shari'a and civil law. Conversion is possible and is accepted.⁶ All religious groups must register with the authorities to obtain official recognition as an organisation. Successful registration is the prerequisite for an organisation wishing to conduct business, open bank accounts, own property, receive private financial support and avail itself of certain tax benefits.⁷

The state seeks to achieve equal treatment in education as well. Up to four hours of (voluntary) religious instruction per week are offered in state-run primary schools and parents may opt for a Muslim or a Christian curriculum.⁸ In addition, there are schools sponsored by denominational entities and co-financed by the state if they meet the required educational standards. The majority of pupils attending Christian-sponsored schools are Muslim.⁹

In 2016, the government of Senegal assisted some 1,500 Muslims with the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca by providing free flight tickets. Assistance was provided for Catholic pilgrimages to Rome and Israel as well.¹⁰

The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs require local or foreign religious groups to submit annual activity reports that include disclosure of financial

transactions. The intention behind this is to identify financing of possible terrorist acts at an early stage. No cases of illegal activity in this regard came to light during the reporting period.¹¹

Incidents

Christians are a respected minority in Senegal. Christian and Muslim holidays are often celebrated together by members of both faiths. Andre Gueye, Catholic Bishop of Thies, said: "We live together in friendship and harmony. Sure, sometimes we have problems with the Muslims – it's like a married couple. But we try to solve them through dialogue."¹² Thomas Volk, a scholar of Islamic studies who manages the office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Senegal, views the situation similarly. He says: "The coexistence of religious groups is working thus far. Senegal is an excellent example of successful inter-religious dialogue."¹³

In spite of the climate of tolerance that prevails in the country, for several years there have been repeated cases of acts of profanation. An example in the current reporting period is the attack by unknown individuals on a church complex in Guédiawaye in early February 2018.¹⁴ The perpetrators destroyed a statue of Mary. At Mass the following Sunday, the priest had to appease angry churchgoers and warn against acts of revenge. A statement from the Minister of the Interior was read on television, describing the break-in at the church as a "disturbance of social peace" and an "attack on religious freedom". The Senegalese army and police have recruited additional staff to protect against Islamist terrorist attacks.¹⁵

The vast majority of believers in Senegal belong to one of the four large Sufi brotherhoods. They represent a peaceful Islam and traditionally concern themselves with the common good. One of the brotherhoods, for instance, organises the bus transport system in Dakar. The Sufi brotherhoods are viewed as a connecting bridge among the people and as a buffer against extremism.¹⁶

Daesh (ISIS) militia have waged attacks on several Sufis in recent years. There are also increasing indications that stricter views of Islam are gaining a foothold in Senegal. For instance, increasingly, women are seen on the streets wearing complete veils. "Senegalese Muslims are under pressure from Saudi Arabia," explains Thomas Volk.¹⁷ Saudi Arabia builds mosques, awards scholarships to young Senegalese people and sends imams to the country. Iran also conducts itself in a self-assured manner here and has just opened a small university in Dakar. Volk states: "We are often witness to the proxy debate between Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia. But we are less aware of the fact that this debate can also occur in Africa."

During the reporting period, a group of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) drew attention to cases of abuse in traditional Qur'an schools known as 'Daaras'.¹⁸ At these schools, it is reported, children are subject to physical and sexual abuse and have been forced to work as beggars. The NGOs called on the government to improve controls of the Qur'an schools and prosecute those who have committed abuse. In July 2016, the

government began implementing a 2005 law banning begging by children, a widespread phenomenon in Senegal.¹⁹

Prospects for freedom of religion

Extremist currents have existed in Senegal since the 1950s when new, strict approaches to religion, influenced by Saudi Arabia, began to emerge.²⁰ Whereas Wahhabists and Salafists coexisted in peace with traditional Sufi brotherhoods in the past, fears of radicalisation by forces beyond Senegal are now apparently on the rise. While there have been no major acts of violence to date, some view the attacks against Christian institutions and Christian symbols as worrying evidence of radicalisation among Muslims.²¹

The realities on the ground seem to justify some of the concern. According to observers, more and more young Senegalese are opting to attend Qur'an schools or the Arabic university.²² A negative consequence of this is fewer opportunities in the labour market, where French skills are often a prerequisite.²³ For some years it has been noticed that an increasing number of young people do not want to join the traditional Sufi brotherhoods. Instead, they feel attracted to Islamists, who also offer them a social network.

Many say religious radicalisation of young people is linked to increasing poverty levels in the country.²⁴ This not only drives many young Senegalese into the clutches of radical forces but also gives them reason to flee to Europe. Senegal ranks fourth among sub-Saharan African countries, and first in West Africa, in terms of the numbers of emigrants. According to official estimates, more than 400,000 Senegalese emigrated in 2011 alone. If illegal emigration were factored in, this figure would probably be twice, perhaps even three times higher.²⁵ It is a vicious circle. The flight by large numbers of young, often well-trained, employees weakens the traditionally moderate religious communities (no matter whether Muslim or Christian). This makes these communities more vulnerable to radical and violent forces, which in many cases redoubles the desire to emigrate.

That is why there is reason to believe that successful measures to combat poverty and a lack of prospects for the future would also help stem the risks posed by Islamist jihadism in West Africa. There must be an effective effort to combat corruption and nepotism in government and other organisations. There is also a need to develop infrastructure. Finally, it will be necessary to continue to move beyond obsolete economic structures, many of which date back to the colonial era, such as the concentration on peanut farming which is often environmentally harmful and heavily dependent upon the world market.²⁶

The success of the effort to combat jihadism in Senegal's neighbouring countries is also particularly important. Mali, which borders directly onto Senegal, is particularly important. Given the violence committed by followers of Al-Qaeda and the Daesh in Mali, Senegal is facing growing concerns about the possibility of an assault by extremist forces. Many Senegalese are alarmed by the presence of many radicalised young people from Senegal within the ranks of Daesh in Libya.²⁷ In January 2017 there was a sign of moderation in Gambia, a country surrounded almost entirely by Senegal. The newly elected Gambian

president, Adama Barrow, overturned the decision by his predecessor, long-time dictatorial leader Yahya Jammeh, to declare Gambia an Islamic republic.²⁸ Before Jammeh declared Gambia an Islamic republic (Africa's second after Mauritania) in 2015, the former British colony had been a secular state.²⁹

Endnotes

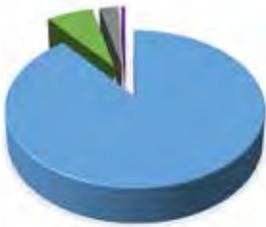
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SERBIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 89,4%
- Muslims: 7,1%
- Agnostics: 2,9%
- Others: 0,6%



AREA

88.499km²

POPULATION

6.718.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 11 of the constitution provides that “no religion shall be established as a state or mandatory religion”. Article 21 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion. Article 43 guarantees freedom of religion, including the right to convert.¹

After decades of suppression under Communism, religion began to flourish again in the 1990s. The break-up of Yugoslavia brought about a need both for new values and the restoration of religion and tradition. Religion and ethnicity are inextricably linked in Serbia and Orthodoxy remains central to the Serb identity. In the 2011 census, the population identified its ethnic identity as follows: Serb 83.3 percent, Hungarian 3.5 percent, Romany 2.1 percent, Bosniak 2 percent, Croats 0.8 percent, Slovak 0.7 percent, Montenegrins 0.5 percent, Vlachs 0.5 percent, other 6.6 percent.

The Law on Churches and Religious Communities recognises seven “traditional” churches and religious communities that have a “historical continuity of multiple centuries in Serbia”: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Slovak Evangelical Church, the Reformed Christian Church, the Evangelical Christian Church, the Islamic community, and the Jewish community.² The legal status of these communities dates from the days of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In addition to these communities, the government grants “traditional” status to the Diocese of Dacia Felix of the Romanian Orthodox Church, with its seat in Romania and administrative seat in Vrsac in Vojvodina. Under the 2005 Law on Finance, only these seven religious communities benefit from tax exemptions. The state also provides funding for religious instruction in public schools in these religions. 0.12 percent of the state budget is allocated to finance the activities of churches and religious communities.

Other religious communities have to follow cumbersome and often incoherent registration procedures. Article 18 of the Law on Churches and Religious Communities states that religious communities that are not considered “traditional” have to supply a memorandum with the names and signatures of at least 100 members. The law prohibits registration if the group’s name includes part of the name of an existing registered group. The Law on Churches and Religious Communities was challenged before the Constitutional Court

on 5th October 2010, but on 16th January 2013 the court declined to assess the constitutionality of a number of provisions of the law.

There are 17 “non-traditional” Churches that have been officially registered in Serbia : the Seventh-day Adventist Church; the Evangelical Methodist Church; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); the Evangelical Church in Serbia; the Church of Christ’s Love; the Spiritual Church of Christ; the Union of Christian Baptist Churches in Serbia; the Nazarene Christian Religious Community; the Church of God in Serbia; the Protestant Christian Community in Serbia; the Church of Christ Brethren in Serbia; the Free Belgrade Church; the Jehovah’s Witnesses; the Zion Sacrament Church; the Union of Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement; the Protestant Evangelical Church Spiritual Center; and the Evangelical Church of Christ.³

The Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches are not registered but they are recognised by the state and allowed to operate freely. The Montenegrin Orthodox Church has still not been able to register, on the grounds that, under Orthodox canon law, territorial overlap between dioceses has to be avoided. The Romanian Orthodox church has no right to operate in certain parts of Serbian territory and the Romanian minority does not always have access to worship in the Romanian language. The members of the Bulgarian national minority have also requested access to worship in their mother tongue.

Religion made its first entry into public schools in July 2001, when the Government passed a decree on the implementation of religious instruction in elementary and high schools.⁴ Pupils may attend either religious instruction or civic education classes, but attendance is mandatory once a week. Religious instruction is taught by priests and laypersons who are selected by the churches and religious communities and appointed and paid by the Ministry of Education.

In February 2016, the Serbian Parliament legislated for the restitution of Jewish property expropriated during the Holocaust. In 2017, Serbia extended compensation to former Serbian survivors living abroad. According to the World Jewish Restitution Organisation, around 1,000 Holocaust survivors from Serbia are living in the USA and Europe.⁵

According to Strahinja Sekulić, Serbia’s Restitution Agency’s General Manager, previously confiscated forests, agricultural and construction land were returned in full to the Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Romanian Orthodox, Evangelical Christian, Greek-Catholic, Reformed Christian, and Slovak Evangelical churches and to the Jewish Community.⁶ Real estate was also returned to Roman Catholic, Serbian Orthodox and Evangelical Christian Churches and to the Jewish Community.

Divisions among Muslims in Serbia have meant that there has been no restitution for the Islamic Community. Both the Islamic Community *in* Serbia (ICiS) and the Islamic Community *of* Serbia (IcoS) have filed requests for the restitution of identical properties as they both claim to be the legitimate successor of the Islamic Religious Community of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, as registered in 1930.⁷

The Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) is the largest church of the country and has an important place in public and political life. It is one of the most influential national institutions and has the clear support of the current state authorities, as well as broad media access.⁸ Article 11 of the Law on Churches and Religious Communities states that “the Serbian Orthodox Church has played an exceptional role in the historical, state-building and civilisation that led to the formation, preservation and development of the identity of the Serbian nation.”⁹ The SOC is divided into 6 metropolitanates, 40 eparchies, and 1 autonomous arch-eparchy.¹⁰ According to the Government Office for Religion, the SOC has 1,962 priests and 1,065 monks and nuns.¹¹ The main educational institution for the Orthodox in Serbia is the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade. Serbian Orthodox believers celebrate their feasts according to the Julian calendar.

Roman Catholics in Serbia live mostly in northern Vojvodina, which is home to minority ethnic groups such as Hungarians, Croats, Slovaks and Czechs. The Catholic Church is organised into four dioceses: the Archdiocese of Belgrade, and the Dioceses of Subotica, Zrenjanin and Srijem.

There are more than 230 churches, with more than 200 parishes and 170 priests. The Catholic Church offers religious education in churches instead of schools because Catholics pupils are spread sparsely across public schools. The Catholic Church maintains the following educational institutions: the Saint Augustine Theological Seminary, the Theological-catechetical Institute, and the Saint Paul Diocesan Classical Gymnasium and Seminary, all based in Subotica.¹²

Muslims make up seven percent of the population and form the third largest religious group. They live mainly in Sandzak, a region in the south-western corner of the country. The Islamic Community in Serbia (ICiS) is based in Sarajevo and the Islamic Community of Serbia (ICoS) is based in Belgrade. Both claim to have a legitimacy which derives from historical continuity. Both organisations consist of Sunni Muslims following the Hanafi school of Islamic Law, and there are no religious differences between them.

The great majority of ICiS’s members are ethnic Bosniaks. The ethnic composition of ICoS’s followers is very heterogeneous and consists of Roma, Bosniaks, Albanians, Ashkali, Gorani, Egyptians, Turks and others. Today, there are more than 190 mosques in Serbia, of which 120 are located in Sandzak.¹³

It is understood that by 2016 50 Serbian citizens, including a number of women and children, had travelled to Syria and Iraq to take part in the war. The majority of them were Bosniak Muslims from the Sandžak region but a few of them were recruited from among the Roma population, including the former imam of the Zemun “para-mosque” Goran Pavlovic. According to Serbian intelligence officials, Islamic extremists claim to be linked to Wahhabi communities in Sandzak.¹⁴ According to the same sources, eight Daesh (ISIS) fighters of Serbian nationality were killed in the conflict. A further seven were jailed for long prison sentences after they returned from the Syrian war zone.¹⁵

The Wahabbis are most numerous in Priboj and Sjenica in Sandzak and in Novi Pazar. The exact number of this group is unknown. There have been instances of them causing

problems in mosques, by interfering with religious ceremonies and trying to impose their way of prayer. After a number of incidents in mosques, ICiS banned Wahabbis from its mosques. Since then, they have been praying in their homes.¹⁶

In 2018, the Islamic Community celebrated 150 years of existence in Serbia.

Incidents

Because of the intertwining of national, ethnic and religious identity, tensions simmer below the surface in Serbian society. The incidents reported below are considered important because they emerge out of this ethnic-religious divide.

On 18th April 2018, the Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal gave Vojislav Šešelj a 10- year prison sentence for war crimes against the Croatian national minority in Serbia in the early 1990s. The prisoner said then that he was ready to repeat his crimes, but this time against the Ethnic Croatian leader in Serbia, Tomislav Žigmanov.¹⁷

On 17th April 2018, during a Serbian National Parliament session, members of the Radical Party surrounded, insulted and threatened the Democratic Party MP Aleksandra Jerkov when she spoke about the sentence given to war criminal Vojislav Seselj. Nemanja Sarovic, an MP from the convicted politician's Serbian Radical Party, called her a liar and denied the crimes for which his leader was convicted at the Hague Tribunal.¹⁸

On 24th March 2018, unknown perpetrators attacked and beat to death 63-year-old Nazir Salihović, imam of a mosque in the Serbian city Novi Pazar. Imam Salihović was attacked when he was going home after leading the night prayer at the mosque. The police launched an investigation to identify the attackers.¹⁹

On 26th May 2017, on the eve of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, local Belgrade authorities demolished an illegally built mosque on the outskirts of the Serbian capital. The construction of the two-storey mosque in the Zemun Polje neighbourhood had started in 2014 even though the authorities had refused to grant it a construction permit.²⁰

About 20,000 practising Muslims live in Belgrade and there is only one mosque, which was built in 1575 during the Ottoman Turkish empire. Mufti Muhamed Hamdi Jusufspahic, head of the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Community of Serbia, said the Belgrade authorities have not issued a single construction permit to the Muslim community over the past five decades. The Serbian Justice Ministry denied such accusations. Mileta Radojevic, head of the ministry's department for cooperation with religious communities said Serbia fulfils all EU criteria on securing religious rights and liberties, and observes its commitments under the constitution.²¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

There is progress in the area of property restitution to religious communities. However, there is a resurgence of hate speech in Serbian public discourse, along ethnic lines, and

this is amplified by wide media coverage. This problem that shows no signs of subsiding. Incidents such as those occurring in the National Parliament have a significant influence on interreligious relations, as well as relations between national and religious minorities.

There is no significant improvement in inter-faith dialogue. It is rare and mostly led by local religious representatives. It remains to be seen how the latest political tensions will influence the status of national and religious minorities and freedom of religion in this country.

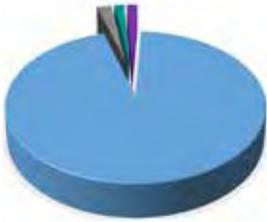
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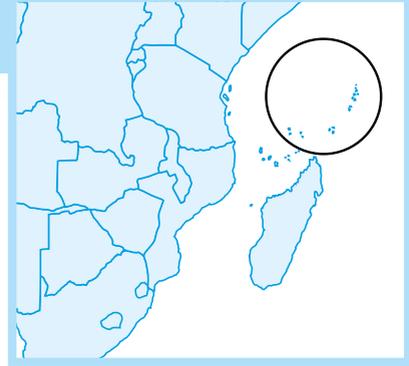
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SEYCHELLES

RELIGION



- Christians: 94,7%
- Agnostics: 2,2%
- Hindus: 1,5%
- Others: 1,6%



AREA
457km²

POPULATION
97.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Seychelles is an archipelago of 115 islands in the Indian Ocean, to the North East of Madagascar. The nation was named after the French Minister of Finance, Vicomte Moreau des Séchelles, by the commander of a French expedition in 1756. The then uninhabited islands were originally settled by the French in 1770 before the British took control during the Napoleonic Wars. The country gained independence in 1976 with the exception of some islands retained as the British Indian Ocean Territory.

The constitution guarantees the right to the “equal protection of the law [...] without discrimination on any ground except as is necessary in a democratic society”.¹ Every person has the right to freedom of thought and religion. This includes the freedom to change religion. It also includes the right “either alone or in community with others and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate the religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance”. This entitlement may be subject to limitations, if they are prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of “defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health; or for the purpose of protecting the rights or freedoms of other persons”.

The population is mainly Christian. The Catholic Church is by far the largest religious community (over 75 percent of the population). There are also Anglicans, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, as well as other Christian groups. There are small numbers of Hindus, Muslims, Baha'is and other non-Christian groups. One hundred years ago, the Muslim population was around 50. Sources suggest it is now between 1,000 and 2,000. There is a Hindu temple in Victoria and the government has declared the Taippoosam Kavadi Festival a holiday for Hindus.

The constitution prohibits any legislation which provides for the establishment of any religion or the imposition of any religious observance. The profession of any particular religion or belief must not be a necessary condition for assuming public office. No one shall be compelled to take an oath contrary to their belief or religion.

By law all religious groups must be registered, either as corporations or as associations. Registration as associations is done at the Registrar General's Office in Victoria, with few

formalities. The Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Baha'is, and the Islamic Society of Seychelles have been constituted as corporations by means of separate legislative acts. There are no penalties for failure to register, but registration is necessary in order to benefit from certain social entitlements. For example, it is not possible to broadcast religious programmes on state media without registration.

Under the constitution, no one attending a "place of education" shall be forced to receive religious instruction or take part in any religious ceremony or observance. However, this does not "preclude any religious community or denomination from providing religious instruction for persons of that community or denomination in the course of any education provided by that community or denomination". Both Catholics and Anglicans provide education during school hours. The Catholic Diocese of Victoria is working with the Ministry of Education towards opening the first Catholic private school in modern times, in 2020.² Any child of any religious denomination will be eligible for entry to the school.

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, but the government controls much of the country's media, and there are certain limitations on such freedom when it comes to religious broadcasting. Although religious organisations may publish newspapers, under the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Act 2000 (as consolidated), they are not able to obtain their own broadcasting licences. Instead the government provides air time on a pro rata basis, depending on the size of the organisation's membership. Live religious broadcasting is prohibited with the exception of radio broadcasts of Catholic Masses and Anglican services.³ 15-minute pre-recorded prayer slots were made available to registered religious groups.⁴ Some smaller groups complain that they are not afforded their own broadcast time.⁵

The country's public holidays reflect the Catholic majority of the population. They include the feasts of Corpus Christi, the Assumption, All Saints and the Immaculate Conception, together with Christmas, Easter, New Year's Day and Labour Day.

As independent observers acknowledge, religious freedom is generally respected by the government in the Seychelles.⁶ Churches and other religious groups function without government interference and feel at liberty to raise matters of concern to them in public and to criticise the government. The Churches have been strong advocates of democracy and human rights in the country.

Incidents

During the period under review, there were no episodes of religiously-motivated discrimination and state employees were given paid leave to celebrate the major religious festivals.

The Seychelles Interfaith Council (SIFCO) annually holds an interfaith harmony week. SIFCO is composed of Christians, Hindus, Baha'is, Muslims and other religions, to promote tolerance and dialogue. In February 2018 the event was attended by Vice President Vincent Meriton, members of the National Assembly, members of civil society, as well as representatives and members of the Citizens Engagement Platform Seychelles.⁷

A book on the history of Islam in the Seychelles was published in December 2016. The book launch was attended by the first president of the Seychelles, James Mancham; the President of the Court of Appeal Francis MacGregor, and members of the diplomatic corps.⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

The situation of the freedom of religion in the Seychelles has remained unchanged since 2016 without any recorded instances of societal action affecting religious freedom. No restrictions are in place on religious worship by any denominations and tax-free status is granted by the government for appropriately registered religious groups. However, while guaranteed by the constitution, religious freedom was restricted in some areas, particularly in regard to the need for government approval for the transmission of religious broadcasts.

Endnotes

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SIERRA LEONE

RELIGION



- Muslims: 65,3%
- Ethnoreligionists: 20,6%
- Christians: 12,4%
- Agnostics: 1,5%
- Others: 0,2%



AREA	POPULATION
72.300 km ²	6.592.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 24 of the 1991 constitution (as amended) recognises each citizen's right to commit to his or her religion or belief, and to practise it either alone or in community with others and both in public and in private, to propagate his or her faith and to change his or her religion.¹ No person can be compelled to take an oath that is contrary to that person's religion or personal convictions. Religious communities are not under obligation to register with the authorities. Communities that do register, however, may enjoy tax relief and other benefits.² Religious education is permitted in public schools as part of a mandatory standard curriculum that must not be sectarian in orientation and is instead based on ethical principles of Christianity, Islam, traditional African faiths and other religions around the globe.³ Religious communities can offer their own curriculum, which is optional for pupils.

Relationships between the country's various religious communities is essentially good. Marriages between Christians and Muslims are not unusual, and there are many families in which followers of different religions or confessions live together under one roof.⁴ It should be noted that many Muslims and Christians also observe the practices of traditional African cults. Among the Christians, the Protestant churches in particular are experiencing growth in membership. The Catholic Church enjoys complete freedom with regard to its missionary apostolate. The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRC), with its Muslim and Christian representatives, makes an important contribution towards peaceful co-existence among the various religious communities.⁵

Incidents

During the current reporting period, the IRC and the Office of National Security (ONS) in Sierra Leone have repeatedly pointed out the dangers to social cohesion posed by Islamic extremism, as well as by some Christian groups.⁶ This is particularly true in relation to young people who live in poverty and who are thus more open towards extremist viewpoints. Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world. This is compounded by the impact of the devastating Ebola epidemic in 2014 and 2015, which claimed many lives.⁷

The ONS has defined Islamist extremism as a national security risk and has made the effort to combat it a central element of the national anti-terrorism strategy.⁸ Interreligious and inter-confessional meetings have been organised to promote religious tolerance and moderation.

More than 200 imams, together with indigenous and foreign Islamic missionaries, attended an ONS workshop entitled 'Terrorism Has No Place in Islam' and signed a joint strategy to combat terrorism. The primary aim of the strategy is to show what Muslim leaders can do in their communities to take effective steps against public hate messages against other Muslim and non-Muslim religious communities.⁹ Workshop participants also committed themselves to take part in a six-month campaign in mosques and on Islamic radio stations. The aim was to disseminate messages of religious tolerance and promote a spirit of good religious coexistence.

In a Pastoral Letter of 11th July 2017, in anticipation of the parliamentary elections set for 7th March 2018, the Catholic Bishops of Sierra Leone called upon the political parties and candidates to "respect the electoral process, to preserve peace, to uphold the interest of the Sierra Leonean people and to see themselves in this pluralistic election as competitors, not adversaries".¹⁰ Priests, religious and lay faithful were called upon to "promote a spirit of unity, reconciliation, tolerance and peace in their sermons, homilies, conferences and pastoral engagements".¹¹

"Our ethnic, cultural and religious differences were put aside in order to achieve a higher good," the bishops pointed out in reference to the Ebola epidemic. "Such desirable attitudes that we manifested so clearly at critical moments in our history should be shown again as we move towards the national elections in 2018 that will define the next phase of our country's history."¹²

Prospects for freedom of religion

Sierra Leone has largely been spared religiously motivated violence to date, but the renewed increase in poverty as a result of the Ebola epidemic makes the country particularly susceptible to violent extremism. This is compounded by the legacy of the civil war of 1991-2002 and natural disasters (often the result of human activity) against which those affected are often unprotected. On 13th August 2017, Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, was hit by a landslide that killed or destroyed the homes of more than 1,000 people.¹³ "This is another tragedy for a country that has yet to recover from the disaster of the Ebola epidemic", said Father Chukwuyenum Afiawari, head of the north-western Jesuit province of Africa. "In responding to immediate needs, we must also keep an eye on and begin planning long-term reconstruction efforts", the Jesuit priest added. "We appeal to all of our Jesuit confreres, communities, and institutions of our entire society, our mission-collaborators, friends and benefactors, and all people of good will so they join this noble cause while we work to bring emergency relief", Father Afiawari said.

This urgent appeal underscores the difficult situation facing Sierra Leone.¹⁴ Religious extremists often find the conditions in the country favourable to unopposed proselytising. Regardless of the fact that peaceful cooperation among religions and confessions enjoys a long tradition in Sierra Leone, a particular danger stems from the Islamist jihadism that is gaining ground in many regions of West Africa.

There are also traditional religious rites that lead to fierce controversies in society. A particularly sensitive topic is the circumcision of young girls.¹⁵ With its majority Muslim population, Sierra Leone is one of the few African countries with no legislation against genital mutilation. The tradition is widespread and is used for political purposes as well. According to police information, during the run-up to the elections held on 7th March 2018, candidates and political parties paid for circumcision ceremonies, and thus purchased votes. The police issued a ban on these ceremonies which remained in effect until election day.

Sierra Leone is on a slow path to economic consolidation in the wake of the severe setbacks of recent years. The expectation is that an effective effort to combat widespread poverty and improve social benefits, such as health care, will help strengthen the peaceful coexistence of religions and confessions.

Endnotes

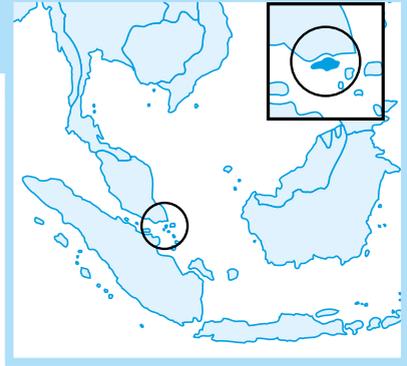
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SINGAPORE

RELIGION



- Chinese Folk Religionists: 38,6%
- Christians: 19,5%
- Muslims: 15,1%
- Buddhists: 14,9%
- Hindus: 5,2%
- Agnostics: 4,6%
- New Religionists: 1,5%
- Others: 0,6%



AREA
719km²

POPULATION
5.697.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Singaporeans continue to enjoy a high degree of religious freedom. Local law asserts this fundamental right and political institutions enforce it: freedom of religion – understood as the freedom to profess, practise and propagate religious beliefs – is fully protected as long as the activities that derive from it are not contrary to laws on public order, public health or morality.

Singapore's 1963 constitution established the principle of religious freedom. Article 15 defines it as the right of everyone "to profess and practise his religion and to propagate it".¹ Each "religious group" has the right "to manage its own religious affairs, to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law".

Another key concept articulated in the constitution is the maintenance of religious harmony throughout the country. Included in the country's fundamental law through a constitutional amendment, religious harmony has been implemented mainly through a law passed in 1990. This law authorises the Minister of the Interior to issue restraining orders against those within a religious group who incite hostility towards members of another religious group, or who promote political causes, carry out subversive activities or encourage others to distance themselves from the government under the pretext of practising a religion.

Restraining orders are discretionary. Refusing to submit to them can trigger legal action. Such orders must go before the chairman of the Council for Religious Harmony, a state body with the power to confirm, cancel or amend them. They have a theoretical duration of 90 days, although such orders can be extended at will by the council chairman.

The Penal Code² prohibits "wounding the religious or racial feelings of any person", as well as knowingly promoting "feelings of enmity, hatred or ill-will between different religious or racial groups". The penalties include fines and detention.

Any religious group of more than 10 people must inform the government of its existence, especially if the group desires official legal status. Muslims constitute a special case; the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura, MUIS), established

by the Ministry of Culture, administers all Islamic affairs in the city-state, including construction and management of mosques, halal certification, fatwas and pilgrimage to Mecca.

Despite the status of religious freedom within the legal and political framework, the aspirations of some Singaporeans come up against the will of the authorities to maintain a high degree of control over civil society. The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act of 1990 has been used against initiatives deemed likely to cause division and discord between religious communities, a laudable concern in a highly multicultural and multi-religious society.³ However, problems arise when the authorities use this law to stifle any political expression they deem deviant.

The groups that Singaporean authorities have especially targeted for surveillance include Jehovah's Witnesses. Present in Singapore since the 1940s, registered legally as a religious community in 1962, their legal recognition was cancelled in 1972 as a result of their refusal to serve in the military (established in Singapore in 1967). In 1996, however, a ruling restored Jehovah's Witnesses' right to profess, practise, and propagate their beliefs, but only as individuals. Since then, the government has not prevented private meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses but continues to ban all public meetings and to jail the group's members for refusing to perform military service (at the time of writing 16 Jehovah's Witnesses are in jail for refusing to serve). Jehovah's Witnesses, who refuse to do their national service, are sentenced to two years in prison, then to two more if they still refuse. After that, they are released since the government deems the time spent in prison as equivalent to the period of national service.⁴ The authorities are aware of the severity of this approach, but do not want to open the door to requests of exemption.

On 13th September 2017, Halimah Yacob became the first woman president of the young Republic of Singapore. Aged 63, a mother of five, and speaker of Parliament since 2013,⁵ Halimah Yacob was the only candidate who met the eligibility criteria, and was therefore elected President of the Republic. The office of the president is essentially ceremonial since real power is vested in the office of the prime minister.

Although the personal qualities of the new president have not been questioned, her appointment has revived some debates in Singapore, namely the place the variety of ethnic and religious communities occupy in society. "...If our leaders really believe in diversity, why are we not advocating hav[ing] a Prime Minister from a minority race?" asked Jeraldine Tan, a young blogger.⁶ Underlying her question is Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's succession after he announced his retirement. Indications suggest Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam is the best placed Singaporean politician to succeed him, but he is Indian. Indeed, in an interview with the BBC⁷ in March 2017, Lee Hsien Loong explained: "I think that ethnic considerations are never absent when voters vote [. . .]. In Singapore, it is much better than before, but race and religion count, and I think that makes it difficult if not impossible, and I hope that one day it will happen. If you ask whether it will happen tomorrow, I do not think so."

Incidents

Despite the privileged state of Islam in Singapore, Muslims are called to account should

they incite hatred toward other faiths. A recent case centres on a Muslim cleric who, during a sermon in one of the city mosques, said: “God help us against Jews and Christians.” Posted on Facebook in February 2017, a video of the imam speaking went viral on social media. As a result, the government took him to court. Despite his apologies to Christian, Sikh, Taoist, Buddhist and Muslim religious leaders, the imam was fined SGD 4,000 (€ 2,700, US\$ 3,000) and was then deported to his native India.⁸

Amos Yee, a teenager from a Catholic family, posted a video on YouTube criticising both Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore’s long-serving first Prime Minister, and Jesus Christ, and then another criticising Muslims. Jailed in 2015 for 53 days for “wounding the religious feelings of Christians and Muslims”, he asked – and obtained in March 2017 – political asylum in the United States.⁹

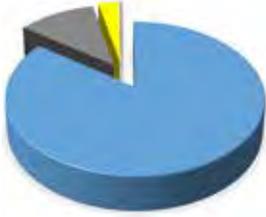
Prospects for freedom of religion

Although Singaporeans continue to enjoy a high degree of religious freedom, the state will have to take into consideration the aspirations of those who desire freedom with less supervision and monitoring by public authorities. This will certainly be one of the issues that will need to be tackled by the successor of current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, son of the country’s first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew.

Endnotes

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RELIGION



- Christians: 85,1%
- Agnostics: 11,6%
- Atheists: 3,1%
- Others: 0,2%



AREA	POPULATION
49.035km ²	5.429.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 24 of the constitution guarantees freedom of religious belief and affiliation, as well as the right to change religious faith or to have no religious affiliation.¹ The constitution states that the country is not tied to any particular faith and religious groups are at liberty to manage their own affairs independently of the state, including providing religious education and establishing clerical institutions. It guarantees the right to practise one's faith privately or publicly, either alone or with others. It states that religious rights may only be restricted by measures that are deemed "necessary in a democratic society for the protection of public order, health, and morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others".²

Legally, if a religious group wants clergy to perform officially recognised services, they must register with the Department of Church Affairs, which is part of the Ministry of Culture. Clergy from unregistered religious groups cannot officially celebrate marriages or minister to their faithful in prisons or public hospitals.³

According to the law on religious freedom (article 12),⁴ religious societies and Churches that want to register must have at least 20,000 adult members, either citizens or permanent residents. The latter must submit a declaration about their membership, show some basic understanding of their religion, include their personal identity numbers and home addresses, and express their support for their group's registration with the Ministry of Culture. The law does not differentiate between Churches and religious societies; it recognises as Churches those groups that call themselves Churches.⁵

Additional benefits come with registration, such as financial support from the state. Non-registered religious societies and Churches are, as a result of a decision by the Constitutional Court, entitled to form different kinds of legal entities, especially civic associations.⁶

In the absence of registration, reports showed that the Muslim community was unable to formally hire an imam. Muslim community leaders continued to complain that prisons and detention facilities frequently prevented their spiritual representatives from gaining access to their members.⁷ Muslim groups also reported that the lack of official registration

made it more difficult for them to obtain building permits for prayer rooms and mosques, even though there is no law that prohibits unregistered groups from obtaining a permit.

In November 2016 the Slovak parliament approved legislation, introduced by the Slovak National Party (SNS), to increase the number of members required by groups seeking registration as religious societies. The membership limit was raised to 50,000 members and the law was due to take effect at the beginning of 2017.⁸ The bill was seen as clearly aimed against Islam. SNS leader Andrej Danko declared that the objective was to ensure that no mosques would be built in the country. A proposal by the opposition far-right People's Party – Our Slovakia to raise the bar to at least 250,000 followers was turned down.⁹

On 20th December 2016 President Kiska vetoed the proposed law, stating that it interfered too much with fundamental rights and freedoms. The president's veto was in turn overturned in a second parliamentary vote in January 2017 and the law came into effect in March 2017.¹⁰ In April 2017, a bill presented by opposition MP Milan Krajniak banning the construction of mosques, was defeated.¹¹

In June 2016 the Ministry of Interior issued a statement that called for an end to online hate speech. According to the Committee for the Elimination of Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism, and Other Forms of Intolerance, which is part of a government advisory body on human rights and national minorities, hate speech often results in physical violence.¹²

On 9th September 2016 Prime Minister Fico, Speaker of Parliament Andrej Danko, and other senior-level leaders commemorated the Day of the Victims of the Holocaust and of Racial Violence at the Holocaust Memorial in Bratislava.¹³

Incidents

A number of non-governmental organisations as well as the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia reported more incidents of violence and online hate speech against Muslims and refugees on the part of extremist groups and politicians. Compared to previous years, Muslims expressed greater fear. The Islamic Foundation monitored online anti-Muslim hate speech, noting many calls for deadly violence against Muslims and refugees.¹⁴

In one case, a Somali woman refugee said that she experienced six physical and verbal attacks in the Slovak capital of Bratislava. On two occasions, she was with her child. On two occasions, someone tried to remove her hijab while shouting anti-refugee and anti-Muslim insults at her. The Slovak Ministry of Interior eventually issued a press release condemning the attacks as well as racial and religious hatred.¹⁵

According to a report by the New York Times, negative attitudes towards Muslims can be felt even in the quiet spa town of Piešťany, which for several decades has been a popular tourist destination for wealthy Arabs. In former times, Muslim visitors were welcome; now they seem to have become victims of verbal attacks.¹⁶

Some far-right groups continued to praise Slovakia's World War II-era fascist regime, which sent thousands of Slovak Jews to Nazi death camps. Likewise, some groups displayed

symbols of the fascist state at their meetings. Online adverts for such events often included pictures with World War II emblems.¹⁷

There were more attacks against Christian symbols and locations than during the last period under review. Most involved acts of vandalism and desecration rather than physical or verbal abuse of individuals. In October 2016 there was an attack on chapels and a church in Turzovka, home to a popular Marian shrine. One of the chapels and the main door of the church were set on fire. The fire did not spread inside the church as the door was fireproof.¹⁸

On 6th January 2018, a statue of Saint Bernadette was stolen for a second time in the city of Zavod. Four days later, in nearby Marianka, two religious statues were desecrated at the local Marian shrine. The hands of the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes were broken off and a statue of Saint Bernadette was broken in pieces and the face disfigured.¹⁹

The Catholic church in the village of Bab was vandalised in November 2017. Various sacred objects were damaged. The same church had been the target of vandalism and robbery only one month before.²⁰ Pornographic videos were recorded inside two Roman Catholic churches and one Greek Catholic church in city of Presov.²¹ In April 2018, a young man stoned and damaged a statue of Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus in the village of Nemcinany.²² The Calvary in Partizanske was destroyed and set in fire. Local police said Satanists may have carried out the attack in which wooden crosses were torn down and burnt alongside Calvary paintings.²³

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

In the wake of the refugee crisis, there has been a clear deterioration of religious freedom for the Muslim minority, at both the political and societal level. This hostility is not universal; in most instances, government officials have opened investigations and strongly condemned hate speech, vandalism and physical violence. There is also opposition to proposed legislative measures directed at Muslims. However, as the refugee crisis intensifies, the situation seems to be worsening. For the other religious groups, the level of religious freedom remains unchanged.

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SLOVENIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 85,6%
- Agnostics: 9,4%
- Atheists: 2,5%
- Muslims: 2,4%
- Others: 0,1%



AREA	POPULATION
20.273km ²	2.069.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Following the country's secession from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, newly independent Slovenia adopted a constitution in 1991 that upholds freedom of religion and the separation of Church and state.¹

In 2007 Slovenia's Parliament passed the Religious Freedom Act.² Article 4 of the Act proclaims the neutrality of the state in matters of religion. Article 5 defines churches and religious communities as "organisations of general benefit", and article 29 stipulates that the state may give material support to religious communities because of the "general benefit" they provide. Article 13 states that in order to be registered, a religious community must have been operating in Slovenia for at least 10 years and must have at least 100 adult members.

According to the Office for Religious Communities, there are 43 registered religious communities in Slovenia.³ These include the Roman Catholic Church, several Protestant Churches, the Orthodox Church, as well as various groups of Muslims, Baha'is, Buddhists, and Hindus. Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists are also registered. More than three-quarters of the registered religious communities may be regarded as new religious movements (NRMs), and there are still others not formally registered as religious communities, but as associations. Overall, research into new religious and spiritual movements in Slovenia estimate that 70 to 100 NRMs operate there.⁴

The Roman Catholic Church is by far the largest religious organisation, making up about three-quarters of Slovene citizens. The country is divided into six dioceses, including the two archdioceses of Ljubljana and Maribor. The Slovenian Bishops' Conference was founded in 1993. Slovenia signed an agreement with the Holy See in 2001 regulating specific issues between the state and the Catholic Church.⁵ Currently, there are 785 parishes in Slovenia, headed by some 1,050 priests and 11 bishops.⁶ The Church owns more than 2,900 churches and chapels. About 80 percent of the country's heritage buildings are owned by the Catholic Church. By 2011, the authorities had settled 99 percent of the 1,191 Catholic denationalisation claims for properties nationalised after World War II.⁷

The number of Catholics in Slovenia is in decline, according to the 2015 report of the Slovenian Catholic Church. The latter also shows a drop in the number of priests and church weddings in the country.⁸

Of the remaining religious communities, the two largest are the Orthodox (2 percent) and the Muslims (2 percent). The Orthodox are primarily Serbs; Muslims are largely Bosnians and Kosovo Albanians.⁹

In 2017 Slovenia celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Although a predominantly Catholic country, Slovenia celebrates Reformation Day as a national holiday because, Primož Trubar, a Protestant clergyman, authored the first books in the Slovenian language. This date is officially considered as the birth of vernacular literature in Slovenia.¹⁰

Incidents

In March 2016, unknown persons vandalised the Cathedral of St Nicholas in the capital Ljubljana with graffiti. The words “Church get out of my womb” were spray-painted on the wall of a church.¹¹

On 15th June 2016, St Daniel’s Catholic Church in Celje was defaced with satanic words and symbols. Similarly vandalised were the Bishop’s residence and a historic column on which stands a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The local police investigated the crime.¹²

On two separate occasions in 2016, pigs’ heads were left at the site of a mosque under construction in Ljubljana.¹³

On 3rd January 2017, vandals desecrated the Catholic chapel on Šmarna gora (St Mary), a hill overlooking Ljubljana. They defaced the building with graffiti written in Arabic. The vandalism was strongly condemned by the Catholic Church as well as the Islamic community in Slovenia.¹⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

Over the past decade, Slovenes have tended to follow the religious trends present in Western European countries. Although Catholicism remains the dominant religion, both attendance at Mass and religious vocations are in decline. Slovenian society has become increasingly secular, with divorce, abortion, euthanasia, and gender equality accepted as commonplace.

Religiosity among the young has decreased substantially in recent years. That said, the proportion of young adult Slovenes identifying themselves as Catholics remains quite high compared to those of other EU countries; research indicates that only 13 percent of them never attend Sunday Mass.¹⁵

Violations of religious freedom are rarely a problem in Slovenia; the erosion of traditional thinking among contemporary Slovenes may pose the greater threat to the vitality

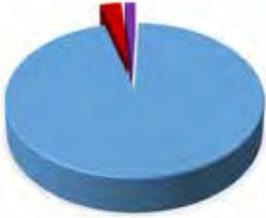
of religion in this country. The three main Christian groups – Catholics, Orthodox and Lutherans – look set to continue to face the problem of growing secularisation in the coming years and decades.

Endnotes

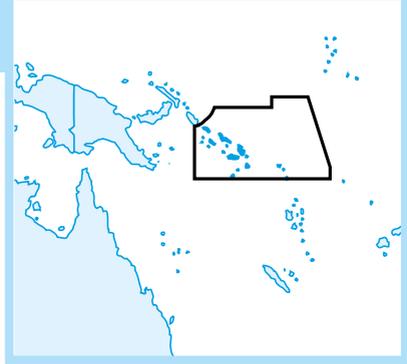
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SOLOMON ISLANDS

RELIGION



- Christians: 95,2%
- Ethnoreligionists: 3,2%
- Others: 1,6%



AREA	POPULATION
28.896 km ²	595.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Solomon Islands consists of six major islands and 900 smaller ones in Oceania to the east of Papua New Guinea.

Under the constitution, every person has the right “either alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.”¹ This includes the right to change religion. These constitutional rights may be qualified by law if that is reasonably required “in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health” or “for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedoms of other persons.” There are no indications that these rights were violated in the period under review.

The country is almost entirely Christian and the five largest denominations are: the Anglican Church of Melanesia (around 30 percent); the Catholic Church (around 20 percent); the South Sea Evangelical Church (around 17 percent); the Seventh Day Adventists (around 12 percent) and the United Church (around 10 percent). There are also a number of smaller Christian Churches, as well as Baha’is, members of the Kwaio community (a form of animism) and Muslims.

According to the constitution, religious communities are entitled to establish, manage and maintain places of education, as well as provide religious instruction. No one who attends such places of education is required to receive instruction in a religion other than his or her own. The curriculum of public schools makes provision for an hour of religious instruction each day.² The Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) is an ecumenical non-governmental organisation formed by Catholics, Melanesian Anglicans and United Methodists; the Seventh Day Adventists and the South Sea Evangelicals are associate members.³ SICA agrees the content of the religious element of the school curriculum. The five largest Christian denominations run schools and health services; they receive government subsidies in proportion to the services offered.⁴ There have been no indications that subsidies are allocated on a discriminatory basis.

Religious groups are required to register with the Registrar of Companies and to complete the necessary formalities. There have been no reports that religious groups were denied registration.

Major Christian feast days are celebrated as public holidays, including Good Friday, Easter Saturday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday and Christmas Day.

Incidents

In the recent past there have been isolated incidents relevant to the topic of religious freedom. A novice in the Melanesian brotherhood was murdered in 2014, though the motive for the attack does not appear to have been religious.⁵ In 2015 there was a religiously-motivated attack by Anglicans on a Seventh Day Adventist church building and the Adventists were told to leave the island.⁶ There have been no reported incidents of societal conflict between religious groups since.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Although there have been reports of disagreements between different religious groups, there are no records of attacks on religious freedom in the period under review. There is no reason to believe that this situation will change in the foreseeable future.

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SOMALIA

RELIGION



- Muslims: 99,8%
- Others: 0,2%



AREA	POPULATION
637.657 km ²	11.079.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Since 1991, there has been no central government in Somalia whose writ runs throughout the country.¹ Somalia has been governed under a provisional federal constitution since August 2012. The constitution defines Somalia as a “federal republic”.² The law enshrines the separation of powers, a federal order and fundamental civil and human rights. This also includes the prohibition of female genital mutilation, which is particularly widespread in Somalia.³ Reports suggest that practitioners of FGM frequently think – erroneously to a large degree – that the practice has religious backing.⁴

The country’s security situation continued to be poor during the period under review and, as result, implementing the constitution was possible only with great difficulties. The status of religion and religious life is governed by the constitution and the legislation shared by the country’s three sub-regions (Somalia, Puntland, Somaliland).

Islam is the state religion, and the president must be a Muslim.⁵ In Somaliland, this requirement also extends to the office of the vice president. The provisional constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens, regardless of their religion. At the same time, however, it also stipulates that legislation must be in harmony with Shari’a law. The provisional constitution applies to all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation. As a result, non-Muslims are also subject to legislation that follows the principles of Shari’a. While conversion from Islam to another religion is not expressly prohibited by the provisional constitution, it is not accepted at a societal level. Under the constitutions of Somaliland and Puntland, on the other hand, conversion is expressly prohibited.⁶ Non-Muslims are prohibited from professing their faith in public.

Islamic religious instruction is mandatory in all public and Muslim schools throughout the country.⁷ Only a few non-Muslim schools are exempt. All religious communities must register with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In practice, however, this tends to be haphazard, either because the criteria under which registration should occur are not clear, or because the authorities are overwhelmed with the work of registering these communities.⁸ The following rules apply in all three parts of the country: in the event that the central

government is not operational, special arrangements have been developed at local and regional levels based on traditional Somali law and Shari'a.⁹

Because of the threat posed by the Al-Shabaab Islamist terror group however, there were delays regarding presidential or parliamentary elections. Instead, the president was chosen by parliament, and the members of parliament were appointed by delegates of the country's clans. Parliamentary elections were finally held in early October 2016 and on 8th February 2017, 184 MPs out of 328 elected Mohamed Abdullahi 'Farmajo' Mohamed as president.¹⁰

Proceedings against the Al-Shabaab extremists are tried before military courts, but human rights activists are critical of their procedures and judgements. The most severe form of punishment, the death penalty, is still practised.¹¹ Al-Shabaab was driven out of Mogadishu with international assistance, and yet it continues to carry out numerous attacks in the city and elsewhere.¹² In the wake of the long war, the human rights situation in the country is disastrous. People are summarily executed without trial, and often violent attacks are waged on groups and individuals.¹³ In the area under Al-Shabaab influence, where a stricter form of Shari'a is in effect, there are serious human rights violations, including executions by stoning.¹⁴

Sunni Muslims are thought to make up nearly 100 percent of the population¹⁵ and other religious communities are very small. There are also some Shia Muslims. Around 94 percent of the population are of Cushite descent and share the Somali language and Muslim faith.¹⁶

Tolerant Sufi Islam was once widespread in Somalia and, for centuries, relations with other religions were good. In the past 20 years, however, Islamist extremism has prevailed in the country. Violence was widely present in the country during the period under review. The existence of Daesh (ISIS) as well as Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab were confirmed by sources including the Church.¹⁷

As Western intelligence reports have reported, Somalia is now understood to have Daesh cells. They are said to be former Al-Shabaab fighters who joined up with foreign fighters from the Middle East and who have been coming to Somalia in the wake of Daesh's defeat in Syria and Iraq.¹⁸ The Apostolic Administrator of Mogadishu, Bishop Giorgio Bertin of Djibouti, confirmed their presence in Somalia. The Somali press has reported on this as well. The extremist militants are thought to be active mainly in Puntland, the partially autonomous region in the north-east of the country.¹⁹

Somalia's small number of Christians includes immigrants from neighbouring countries. A small community of Somali Christians lives in Mogadishu, with about 30 mostly older faithful.²⁰ They are in hiding, out of fear of reprisals from militants. They are forced to practise their faith underground, Father Stefano Tollu, the military chaplain of the Italian section of the training mission financed by the European Union, managed to contact a member of the community. Moses (not his real name) is a Christian who grew up when Somalia was an Italian colony. The rare meeting was kept brief in order not to arouse suspicion. Nevertheless, according to Father Tollu, the encounter was very intense.²¹ Moses said his community of Somali Catholics were under threat.²²

Christians in Somalia face dangers and threats even within their own families, Father Tollu noted.²³ The generation born in the 1990s is more intolerant and can no longer understand their older relatives who have become Christian. In response, older family members have left their children and grandchildren. Some Christians have even been killed by their own grandchildren. Moses told Father Tollu: "Violence is in homes and we, who are few in number, risk our lives every day".²⁴

The remaining few Somali Catholics do not receive regular spiritual assistance. Father Tollu confirmed that the safety of a priest in Mogadishu cannot be guaranteed.²⁵

Incidents

During the current reporting period, Somalia remained one of the most dangerous countries in the world. The nation has seen repeated deadly attacks, sometimes on a weekly basis. A deterioration is evident as a result of Daesh gaining a foothold. This decline applies not least to religious freedom. Al-Shabaab extremists have been fighting for the creation of a so-called theocracy for years and have already killed thousands of people in attacks and assaults.²⁶ There are fears that domestic security forces will be unable to gain control over the extremists when the 21,000-strong international force stationed by the African Union (AMISOM) completes its withdrawal in 2020.²⁷

On 14th October 2017, a terrorist attack took place in Mogadishu's commercial district involving a truck loaded with explosives. According to initial accounts, the attack claimed at least 358 lives and injured more than 200²⁸ although other sources put the number killed at nearly 600.²⁹ No one claimed responsibility for the attack but President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed blamed it on Al-Shabaab. It was the worst bomb attack in the history of Somalia.³⁰

In early March 2018, Al-Shabaab fighters killed at least three Burundian soldiers stationed in Somalia as part of the international peace mission.³¹ Seven soldiers were injured, some of them severely. A convoy carrying the Burundian troops was attacked with rocket launchers and guns on the road from Mogadishu to Jowhar. An armoured vehicle was destroyed, and four trucks were gutted by fire. Burundi has deployed 5,000 soldiers as part of the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). The purpose of the mission is to help stabilise Somalia and push back Al-Shabaab. The militants claimed responsibility for the attack in a radio message. They claim to have killed 23 Burundian soldiers and destroyed 17 vehicles but these figures may be exaggerated.

At least four soldiers from neighbouring Uganda were killed in an Al-Shabaab attack on Easter Sunday 2018. The blast on 1st April 2018 struck at an African Union (AU) military base.³² The blast was followed by a heavy gun battle between AU soldiers and Al-Shabaab fighters. Ugandan army spokesman, Richard Maremire, reported that four Ugandan soldiers were killed and another six wounded. The extremists suffered 30 casualties. The Islamists claimed to have killed 59 Ugandan soldiers. Reports suggest that the attacks were aimed at intimidating the AU and African nations for siding with the Somali central government.

Extremist militants were reported to have released a video in December 2017 calling on Daesh affiliates “to ‘hunt down’ the non-believers and attack churches and markets”³³ That same month, the US reportedly launched its first drone attack on Daesh causing numerous deaths.

All of this is taking place against a background of widespread instability. There are repeated and heavy attacks by extremists groups, particularly in the capital of Mogadishu³⁴ The violence has less impact on the local population since the attacks usually target foreigners.

Prospects for freedom of religion

There is little hope of improvement in the situation in the Horn of Africa not merely as a result of continuous violence but also because of increased extremist violence across Somalia. Central government is weak and the international community in showing less willingness to commit to a lasting involvement in the country. Concern is mounting that militant groups’ activities are spreading into neighbouring Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti).

After the fall of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991, Somalia has endured sustained violence, with a rise in attacks by extremist groups – including the devastating October 2017 terror attack. This chaos is in stark contrast to the moderate Islam in Somalia of former times.

International interest in Somalia is in decline. For example, despite the ongoing violence in Somalia, the German military pulled out of training the country’s security forces at the end of March 2018.³⁵

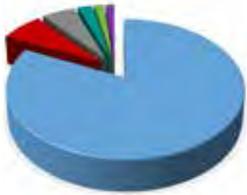
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SOUTH AFRICA

RELIGION



- Christians: 82,2%
- Ethnoreligionists: 6,9%
- Agnostics: 5,4%
- Hindus: 2,4%
- Muslims: 1,7%
- Others: 1,4%



AREA	POPULATION²
1.221.037 km ²	54.979.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 9 of the South African constitution of 1996 (as amended) prohibits any form of discrimination, including discrimination on the grounds of religion.¹ Under article 15: “[E]veryone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.”² Under article 31, members of particular religious communities have the right to practise their religion and to form or join religious associations.³

Religious instruction is an approved but not compulsory subject in public schools and must not represent the views of any single religion.⁴ The school calendar takes the church holidays of the main religious communities into account. Christmas and Good Friday are among the holidays observed nationwide.

The South African Human Rights Commission is the entity in charge of monitoring the handling of constitutional guarantees of religious freedom. The commission, together with the courts, is responsible for the prosecution of suspected violations.⁵

Religious communities are not required by law to register with the authorities, but communities that do so may benefit from tax relief.⁶

Incidents

The first report of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistics Communities (CRL) was published in July 2016. The report complained that religious issues and questions were exposed to increasing commercialisation in South Africa. The report speaks of illegal and unethical advertising of religious and traditional healing services and an abuse of people’s belief systems.⁷ Religion and belief systems in Africa are threatened not only by violent extremists, but also by the spread of phenomena associated with modern forms of life.

There is a relatively high number of attacks against people of Jewish faith in South Africa, even though the number has declined since the previous reporting period.⁸ The South African Jewish Board of Deputies registered 38 anti-Semitic incidents from January

through November 2016 alone.⁹ The incidents included intimidation, verbal attacks, as well as anti-Semitic graffiti on public buildings. Among other things, a call to “Kill a Jew” was sprayed on buildings of the University of the Witwatersrand.¹⁰ It is presumed that this was linked to demands to release the known anti-Semite Mcebo Dlamini from prison.¹¹ Dlamini was incarcerated pending trial for several criminal offences. He attracted notice during the previous reporting period for anti-Semitic statements on the radio and online social media.

There were also anti-Muslim attacks in South Africa during the reporting period. In September 2016, vandals wrote anti-Muslim messages on the walls of houses in the Eersterust residential district in the municipality of Tshwane. The district has a mosque and a large Muslim community.

In April 2016, 3,000 of a total of 10,000 residents of Valhalla, near Pretoria, protested against the planned construction of a mosque.¹² According to media reports, some demonstrators threatened to slaughter pigs on the planned construction site. Others claimed the mosque, if actually built, would become a breeding ground for terrorists. Some demonstrators carried signs reading “Paris, Brussels, Valhalla??? NO!” or “Geen ISIS in Valhalla” (Afrikaans for “No Islamic State in Valhalla”).

Prospects for freedom of religion

There is little reason to expect any substantial shift in the current situation with regard to freedom of religion in South Africa. However, growing immigration from areas of crisis elsewhere in Africa, which includes Islamic countries such as Somalia, brings a potential for conflict. Moreover, poverty in South Africa is increasing, and experience shows that a significant level of poverty is often one of the greatest driving forces for religious tensions.

According to the Catholic Church, xenophobic sentiment towards migrants from other parts of Africa already exists among large segments of the South African population.¹³ The economic situation is difficult for many people generally – native-born South Africans and non-citizens alike – and migrants are often viewed as a cause of general impoverishment. The Church made reflection on racism and xenophobia the centre of its Lenten campaign in 2018. It did this against the backdrop of its many previous activities in support of migrants in South Africa.

The consequences of the change in government in South Africa in 2018 remain to be seen. The Catholic Bishops welcomed the resignation of former President Jacob Zuma.¹⁴ They want to do everything in their power to support the new government of President Cyril Ramaphosa:¹⁵ “We are at a moment in the history of our nation when the people, through their determination, have started to turn the country around”, said the newly elected President in his State of the Nation Address in Parliament. This marks the first time since 1994 that a president has spoken of a change in direction for the country. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference observed in a position statement: “We are particularly happy with the emphasis on Unity, Ethical Leadership, and the total equality of all citizens; the

intention to reduce poverty and youth unemployment, improve education access for the children of the poor; concentrated effort on greater employment will certainly bring hope to all South Africans.”¹⁶

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SOUTH KOREA

RELIGION



- Christians: 33,1%
- Buddhists: 24,9%
- Ethnoreligionists: 15,1%
- New Religionists: 14,1%
- Confucianists: 10,8%
- Agnostics: 1,5%
- Others: 0,5%



AREA	POPULATION
100.284km ²	50.504.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Constitution of the Republic of Korea (South Korea), first introduced in 1948 and revised in 1987,¹ guarantees for all citizens freedom of conscience (article 19) and freedom of religion (article 20). Article 11 bans all forms of discrimination on the basis of religion at the political, economic, social or cultural levels. There is no recognised state religion and article 20 of the constitution officially upholds the principle of the separation of Church and state.

Under article 37, freedoms set out in the constitution may only be restricted by law when necessary for national security, law and order, or public welfare, and any restriction must not violate the “essential aspect” of freedom.

The law does not require religious organisations to register; from an organisational point of view, they are completely autonomous. Religious groups can register to obtain legal recognition as authorised by local authorities. The procedure to register as a religious group can vary according to local bylaws. The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism’s Office of Religious Affairs is responsible for relations with the country’s larger religious groups like the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism and the Christian Council of Korea. The Religious Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism is tasked with supporting interreligious dialogue and activities.²

Religion cannot be taught in public schools but there is total freedom in private schools. The only religious statutory holidays are Christmas and the Buddha’s birthday.

South Korean law requires all male citizens to enlist in the military between the ages of 20 and 30, for 21 to 24 months.³ There is no provision in law for alternative service or conscientious objection. Those who refuse military service risk a maximum three-year prison sentence. After more than 18 months in prison, conscientious objectors are no longer required to serve in the military nor are they under any obligation to perform reserve duties or liable for fines or other penalties. By contrast, those who served but refuse reserve duties are liable to fines. Every year there are several call-ups for reserve duties for a period of eight years. Each jurisdiction imposes its own fines, on average 200,000 Korean won (US\$166) for a first conviction with a maximum of 2,000,000 won

(US\$1,662) per conviction. Courts can impose prison terms on repeat offenders (from one day to three years) in lieu of fines.⁴

Incidents

According to Watchtower International, a Jehovah's Witnesses-affiliated non-governmental organisation (NGO), 495 Jehovah's Witnesses were in prison for conscientious objection to military service as of August 2016, another 367 were on trial and 41 under investigation, an increase in the total number of cases from the previous year. The US State Department Office of International Religious Freedom reports that two other district courts, and a court of appeals, ruled in favour of recognising the rights of conscientious objectors. The two district courts also petitioned the Constitutional Court to look at the constitutionality of the law regulating conscientious objection.⁵

In May 2018, a district court in Incheon acquitted a Jehovah's Witness and upheld his right to conscientious objection, ruling that freedom of conscience is a fundamental right related to the value of human dignity as protected by the constitution. For Judge Lee Dong-gi, "The defendant and conscientious objectors with religious beliefs intend to carry out noncombat alternative service that is more difficult and longer than military service." For this reason, "His level of violating law and order is different from other draft dodgers."⁶

With the exception of the issue of conscientious objectors to military service, there appear to be no other infringements or violations of freedom of religion or belief in South Korea.

Prospects for freedom of religion

With constitutional protections and the democratic system well established, and a positive track record in upholding the right to freedom of religion or belief, the prospects for freedom of religion in South Korea are very good. Indeed, among countries in Asia, South Korea remains – whatever other faults it may have – a beacon of democracy, human rights and freedom of religion in the region.

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SOUTH SUDAN

RELIGION



- Christians: 61,2%
- Ethnoreligionists: 32,2%
- Muslims: 6,1%
- Others: 0,5%



AREA	POPULATION
658.841km ²	12.733.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Peace Agreement signed in August 2015 by South Sudan President Salva Kiir and rebel groups¹ stipulated that, 18 months after the establishment of the Transitional Government of National Unity, there would be a new constitution accommodating points included in the earlier agreement. A draft constitution, known as the Transitional Constitution Amendment Bill, was approved by the government in November 2017.² At the time of writing, no amendments from the Peace Agreements had been incorporated into the constitution.³

The current transitional constitution, ratified on Independence Day (9th July 2011) and subsequently amended in 2013 and 2015, enshrines in article 8 the separation between religion and state, and guarantees all religious groups are treated equally. Article 23 details religious rights in the country.⁴

In general, there is a high degree of tolerance in society towards religious groups. Christian and Muslim groups share common initiatives. Religious groups are able to register with the Ministry of Human Affairs through the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission.⁵

Recently the National Communication Authority has implemented an annual payment of US\$ 5,500 from each of the nine radio stations affiliated to the Catholic Radio Network.⁶ It is not known whether such charges apply to other faith-based stations but, in any case, this very costly fee threatens the economic viability of existing Catholic stations.

The security situation in different parts of the country has very much deteriorated during the current reporting period. Despite truces and peace agreements, lasting and meaningful peace is very far from reality for most South Sudanese, with several basic liberties at risk on a daily basis. Furthermore, political leaders and government officials, are often accused of failing to protect the civilian population.⁷

South Sudan's present security situation over the last few years, apart from being very serious, has huge implications as regards freedom of speech for faith-based groups. In recent years, numerous massacres and atrocities have taken place in the country, with

the perpetrators often enjoying total impunity. Between 50,000 and 300,000 people have died in armed conflict over the last four years

Faith-based groups and organisations are at the forefront of the aid offered to displaced persons and to victims and casualties of the armed conflict. Churches and other places of worship often serve as sanctuaries for thousands of people who have fled their homes.

The prevailing insecurity, the deteriorating rule of law and the wide availability of small weapons enable armed robbers and criminals to target parish houses, church vehicles, convents, religious agencies and presbyteries. According to research carried out by a local radio station, around 40 religious leaders were killed between 2013 and 2017.⁸

Given the lack of ethics within the government and among the political elite in South Sudan, where security forces are suspected of being responsible for two-thirds of human rights violations,⁹ religious leaders are often the only social actors with credible moral authority, able to challenge those in power and denounce acts of violence and injustice. This prophetic role often jeopardises the personal safety of those faith leaders who speak out.¹⁰ Some religious leaders have shunned the celebration of the National Day of Prayer called by the President, accusing him of being one of the root causes of the present armed conflict.¹¹

Incidents

Radio Bakhita, a Juba-based Catholic radio station, was harassed several times by security officers after it broadcast the homily of a high-ranking Catholic priest who heavily criticised the government and the opposition.¹²

A priest belonging to the Mundri Diocese of the Episcopal Church of Sudan was arrested, tortured and executed, allegedly on orders of the state governor, after he was accused of providing food to units of a rebel movement known as Sudan People's Liberation Movement In Opposition (SPLM-IO).¹³

Local authorities in Gbudue state closed down a church called Gundeti Mbori Catholic Church, Genezareth on charges of operating irregularly and of false affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church. Local church leaders were allegedly asking HIV-patients among the congregation to stop taking their medication.¹⁴

A lay catechist in charge of the Mondikolok chapel in the Catholic Parish of Lomin (Kajo-Keji County) was killed together with four other people during clashes between government and opposition forces. According to church sources, he worked for dialogue and reconciliation between warring parties.¹⁵

Three clergy from the Episcopal Church of Sudan were killed in early 2017. Rev Simon Kwaje, a priest working at the Emmanuel Cathedral, was found dead in Yei town on 12th March 2017. The motives behind the murder and the identity of the assailants were unknown.¹⁶ Rev Wilson Tatawa was killed on 26th March 2017 at Kundi village, in Mundari East County/Amadi State.¹⁷ Rev Mathew Mangok Alek was shot dead by unknown

gunmen on 18th April 2017 in Gargar village, Tonj state, while he was travelling along the Tonj-Mapel road.¹⁸

Joel Mwendwa, an Evangelical bishop of Kenyan origin, was killed with a machete in the Juba suburb of Munuki in the early hours of 24th June 2017. The assailant was arrested by police and he accused the clergyman of constantly disturbing him with noisy activities taking place at the church.¹⁹

The female coordinator of the Peace and Justice Department of the Catholic Diocese of Wau was arrested after taking part in a UN-organised workshop on human rights for the military, where three participating army officers died of food poisoning. The precise charges laid against her were unclear.²⁰

On 5th February 2018, a Kenyan Catholic priest from the Diocese of Tombura-Yambio was expelled by authorities of Tombura state following an order issued by Minister Joseph Marko Wanga Bilali. The missionary was taken by plane to Kenya.²¹ A subsequent statement by the local bishop accused the authorities of Tombura State of mistreatment and torture of clergy and of making false accusations against the priest.²² Several priests were arrested at the same time, but were later released.

On 24th April 2018, a humanitarian worker employed by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) was killed by unknown gunmen who attacked his vehicle.²³

Prospects for freedom of religion

Massive human rights violations – including massacres of innocent civilians, forced displacement, recruitment of child soldiers, rape as weapon of war and other war crimes – continue to occur in South Sudan. Perpetrators act with total impunity, taking advantage of a security situation which has severely deteriorated. Their actions are often covered up by political groups, security forces, rebel groups and other influential circles. Civilians are largely unprotected from abuses. The government remains highly inefficient and extremely partisan, showing little desire for social change. Government figures and other politicians act against religious leaders critical of government policies and nefarious practices.

Much of the violence and upheaval in South Sudan is clearly attributable to political and ethnic factors, but there is a religious dimension as well. Faith-based groups suffer hugely for taking an outspoken moral stance against atrocities. There is little chance of improvement in the immediate future.

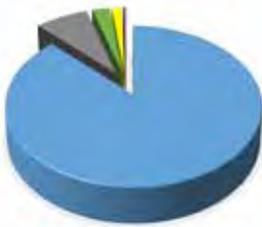
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RELIGION



- Christians: 87,6%
- Agnostics: 7,9%
- Muslims: 2,6%
- Atheists: 1,5%
- Others: 0,4%



AREA	POPULATION
505.944km ²	46.065.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 16 of the constitution of 1978¹ protects religious freedom. Relations between the Spanish state and the Catholic Church are regulated by the agreement of 28th July 1976 and the agreements of 3rd January 1979 on legal, economic, educational and cultural matters, as well as religious assistance in the Armed Forces and the military service of members of the clergy.²

In addition to the Catholic Church, the Spanish state has regulated its relations with other faiths by enacting the following legislative acts: Law 24/1992 approving the Cooperation Agreement between the state and the Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities of Spain,³ Law 25/1992 on the Cooperation Agreement between the state and the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain,⁴ and Law 26/1992, the Cooperation Agreement between the state and the Islamic Commission of Spain.⁵

Religious freedom in Spain is also regulated by the Organic Law 7/1980 on Religious Freedom,⁶ as well as Organic Laws 1/2002 on the Right of Association,⁷ 2/2006 on Education,⁸ 10/1995 on the Penal Code,⁹ 8/2013 on the Improvement of Educational Quality,¹⁰ and 6/2001 on the Universities.¹¹

Incidents

The Catholic Church is Spain's majority religion with 32,556,922 members and 22,999 parishes.¹² Although it has the largest number of followers, it is also the one that has experienced the most incidents, ranging from insults in the media to attacks on individuals and places of worship.

Media reports have highlighted incidents of anti-Christian graffiti in universities. The graffiti clearly indicated intent to incite hatred and intimidate Catholics. There were repeated incidents of graffiti at the church at the King Juan Carlos University (Universidad Rey Juan Carlos de Madrid (URJC)), a public university in Madrid. Sprayed statements included "Church outside URJC", "Masses out, no more crucifixes" and "Goodbye Mass URJC".¹³ Spain's Observatory of Freedom of Religion and Conscience 2017 report noted the esca-

lation of “a left-wing anti-Christian secular intolerance”. One case involved unidentified attackers who threw an incendiary device inside the chapel of the Autonomous University of Madrid, another public university. The report states that they “threw Molotov cocktails, destroyed one of its religious statues... [and] the church was sprayed with a message stating that ‘the only Church that illuminates is one that is burning.’”¹⁴ This same chapel was vandalised in June 2016.¹⁵ This same chapel was vandalised in June 2016.¹⁶

Increasingly, consecrated men and women of the Catholic Church are the target of physical and verbal attacks. One such case involved an attack on a nun in Granada,¹⁷ a Sister of the Congregation of the Slaves of the Immaculate Child. A stranger attacked her without warning and punched her, shouting: “For a nun”. The Sister’s nose was broken in the attack. The attacker was identified and the police passed the information to the appropriate legal authority.¹⁸

The Catholic Church has reported a significant rise in the number of desecrations of the Eucharist, especially the theft of the consecrated host in several parts of the country, including Segovia, Valencia, Parla (Madrid), Alcalá de Henares (Madrid) and Castellón. The desecration of the Blessed Sacrament in the parish of San Alfonso Rodríguez in El Sotillo (Segovia) prompted widespread media coverage. A window and several doors were forced open and a pyx – a small receptacle used for taking Holy Communion to the sick – was stolen from the tabernacle.¹⁹ The local Civil Guard (police) launched an investigation after finding the pyx.²⁰

In 2017 there was a rise in insults and attacks against the Catholic faith, especially in the fields of art, culture and the media. This continued into 2018, with a carnival-time parody of the Last Supper. The performance of a “drag queen” ridiculed the Catholic religion at the carnivals of Las Palmas de Gran Canarias, which was seen around the world.²¹ The incident did not elicit much reaction, except for a statement by the Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Spain and the Bishop of Las Palmas.

During the period under review, the number of burglaries and attacks against Catholic places of worship increased across the country with the theft of images, crucifixes, tabernacles, bells, money and religious objects. In the Diocese of Astorga (León) there were some 60 burglaries at churches over a 15-month period.²² The Civil Guard arrested two people in connection with more than 40 church burglaries.²³ However, no direct link could be established between these incidents and religious freedom.

In 2017, various leftist political groups called on local and regional institutions to repeal agreements signed with the Holy See. With the support of the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party, the Podemos Party and the Republican Left of Catalonia, the lower house of the Spanish Parliament approved a request to the government to suspend the agreements with the Vatican.²⁴ In the Congress of Deputies, these parties also presented various non-legislative proposals demanding the elimination of religion from the school curriculum,²⁵ as well as doing away with the fixed tax collected from personal income tax in favour of the Catholic Church²⁶ and the Sunday broadcast of Holy Mass on state television.²⁷ A socialist was elected Prime Minister of Spain in June 2018.

With respect to other religions, of particular note was the Citizen Platform Against Islamophobia's (PCI) Annual Report in Spain 2017, which recorded 573 incidents against Islam in 2016, mainly in Catalonia, Andalusia and the Valencian Community.²⁸ Media reports add that: "In total, the PCI followed up on 573 cases, more than double the previous year, half of them occurring on the internet and social media."²⁹

The PCI report highlights that attacks on mosques – in most cases by extreme right groups – were particularly numerous in the days following Islamist attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils in August 2017 (see paragraph below). Similarly, it mentioned attacks on 14 businesses or establishments connected to Muslims, within a few days. However, it also noted as a positive development the growing differentiation made between Islam and terrorist groups that carry out attacks.

Daesh (ISIS) claimed responsibility³⁰ when a militant Islamist drove a van at high speed killing 15 people and injuring more than 120 others in Las Ramblas, Barcelona in August 2017. The day before this attack, a house in Alcanar, Tarragona, was destroyed in an explosion³¹, according to police, the intended target was the Sagrada Familia Basilica in Barcelona. The day after the Las Ramblas massacre, police killed five suspected terrorists who rammed a police car. One of the attackers also stabbed a woman. Spanish authorities linked these events to a terrorist cell of 12 members, led by a militant Imam. After the attacks, thousands of marchers including many Muslims went down Las Ramblas with banners stating "Muslims against terrorism" and "we are Muslims, not terrorists."³²

Prospects for freedom of religion

One of the most important events connected to religious freedom in the country last year was the first Spanish publication of a joint communiqué by various religious confessions in the face of attacks against religious groups. It was signed by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Spain, the Islamic Commission of Spain and the Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities of Spain. It was presented to the public on 20th February 2018.³³

It expressed "concern and sadness for the constant and repeated offences against the religious feelings of the faithful of different confessions. Faced with this situation, there was a request for mutual respect for both believers and non-believers."³⁴ The representatives of Spain's main religions drafted the joint statement demanding respect.

The statement read: "In our country, there is still incomprehensible social tolerance for offending religious feelings. In Spain, places of worship and religious symbols are desecrated; the most sacred references of the religious faith of millions of people are publicly mocked and scorned with impunity." In the statement, Muslims, Jews and Christians recorded that they "find it unacceptable that [the offenders] seek to protect themselves by invoking freedom of expression".

Against this background, Spain's religious groups note their commitment to continue working together with the rest of Spanish society for peace, integration and coexistence

in freedom and for the common good. Although religious freedom is guaranteed in the country, there is concern about the rising number of incidents of anti-Christian intolerance carried out by secular groups.

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SRI LANKA

RELIGION



- Buddhists: 68,4%
- Hindus: 13,2%
- Christians: 9,1%
- Muslim: 8,6%
- Others: 0,7%



AREA

65.610km²

POPULATION

20.811.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Although peace has returned to Sri Lanka after decades of a civil war which ended in the military defeat of the Tamil Tigers in 2009, religious harmony and unity remain fragile in the country. As part of the current process of constitutional reform, politicians are examining whether the country's institutions should keep their current centralised form of government or move towards some kind of federalism. At the same time, as part of this process, a decision must be taken regarding the place in the new basic law of Buddhism, the religion of the majority of the population.

For President Maithripala Sirisena, the goal is to move away from the presidential system of government set up under the 1978 constitution. This has been blamed for the authoritarian regime the country experienced under the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa (2005-2015). The new basic law should increase the powers of Parliament and define the level of devolution of power to the regions in order to meet the political aspirations of the Tamil and Muslim minorities. However, in doing so, the president has touched a particularly sensitive nerve, namely the place of Buddhism in the institutions of the nation.¹ While the 1948 constitution, granted by the British at the time of independence, established the principle that no one should receive preferential treatment under the law on the basis of religion, the 1972 constitution and then the 1978 constitution made Buddhism the state religion by granting it "foremost" status. As article nine of the 1978 constitution says: "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana."² It is still unclear whether the new constitutional text will maintain Buddhism's current status. For now, the incumbent administration appears to be playing for time.

After the 2015 elections, the next legislative and presidential elections are scheduled for 2020. The local elections on 10th February 2018 essentially pitted the Sri Lanka Freedom Party of President Maithripala Sirisena and its ally, the United National Party of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, against the Sri Lanka People's Front of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa.³ The poll resulted in an outright victory for the opposition party of the former president, which won the majority of local councils.⁴ Tensions have led the incumbent government to take a wait-and-see attitude to avoid antagonising the most

nationalist elements of the Sinhalese majority and the most extremist agitators among the country's Buddhist monks.

The setbacks regarding the institutional reforms deemed necessary for peace have prompted some religious leaders to take matters into their own hands. On 10th March 2017, in Colombo, the Maha Bodhi Society brought together several senior Buddhist and Christian religious leaders. Dedicated to the spread of Buddhism in South Asia, the society provides a forum of dialogue between the major world religions. Venerable Bellanwila Wimalarathana Nayaka Thero, a monk who for many years has engaged in the inter-faith harmony initiatives, made a proposal widely considered to be unique. He said: "It is not the politicians but us who are close to the people so religious leaders should be given a more prominent place in the [national] reconciliation process. I propose a mechanism of religious councils to be set up at the divisional, district and national levels to promote national unity and reconciliation." He noted that while it is the constitution's role to establish the necessary conditions for the nation's political unity, religious harmony is an area in which religious leaders must take the initiative.⁵

These expressions of goodwill are unlikely to be robust enough to maintain religious harmony in a nation still deeply divided between its Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority. This divide has a religious dimension since the Sinhalese tend to be Buddhist and the Tamils are mainly Hindu. The Christian minority, mostly Catholic, is unique in being found in both Sinhalese and Tamil communities, while Muslims are considered a group apart.

Incidents

In recent years, incidents seem to occur on a regular basis. Hindu Tamils have complained about Buddhist groups building temples and putting up statues of the Buddha in areas controlled by the military in the Northern and Eastern provinces, which are predominantly Tamil. Hindu Tamils see this as evidence that the Sinhalese majority want to expand its cultural and religious influence.

The most notorious incident of aggression was recorded and posted on social media in November 2016; in Batticaloa, a former Tamil stronghold, a monk close to the extremists of the Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Brigade (BBS)) threatened a local government official. After the official launched legal proceedings against some Sinhalese women, he said: "You, Tamil dog, I'm going to kill you."⁶

According to a report by the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka⁷, although violence against religious minorities has slightly fallen in recent years, extremists are still carrying out activities aimed at "intimidating" them. In addition to the BBS, other groups such as the Sinha Le (Lion's Blood),⁸ have been promoting their vision of a "Sinhalese nation". In all, the Evangelical Alliance has reported 89 incidents against Christians in 2016 and 36 in 2017 (as of May 2017). They include denying Christians the right to bury their dead in public cemeteries, the demolition and closure of churches, physical violence

and death threats against individuals. The same report stated that 44 incidents against Muslims had occurred between early 2015 and May 2017, including attacks on mosques or madrassas, hate speech, as well as threats and physical attacks. It should be noted that Buddhist extremists have engaged in hate speech on social media and their words and videos have a large audience.

In June 2017 a human rights lawyer, Mr Lakshan Dias, had to flee the country after participating in a televised debate in which he denounced the rising religious intolerance in Sri Lanka, citing in particular the aforementioned report of the Evangelical Alliance.⁹ The Justice Minister took him to task calling him a “traitor” and an “animal”. After seeking refuge abroad for a while, the lawyer returned home where he was interrogated for seven hours by the police. Three officials of the Evangelical Alliance were also questioned by the authorities.

At least two Muslims were killed and mosques, houses, shops and vehicles were destroyed during three days of rioting in Kandy, central Sri Lanka in early March 2018. According to reports Buddhist monks connected to BBS and Maha Sohon Balakaya travelled to the city to incite attacks. It was claimed that local politicians and police officers took part. More than 300 people were arrested in connection with the riots. The violence was triggered by the death of Buddhist man H. G. Kumarasinghe who was attacked by four Muslim men following a traffic incident.¹⁰

Prospects for religious freedom

In the period under review, there have been some attempts to foster reconciliation between faith communities. For, example, the Arjuna Ranatunga Social Services in Colombo erected the world’s largest artificial Christmas tree on Christmas Eve 2016. However, in light of government actions and statements, there are grounds to fear that the much-needed national reconciliation will progress very slowly in Sri Lanka, allowing extremist Buddhist groups to inflict violence on society, especially religious minorities.

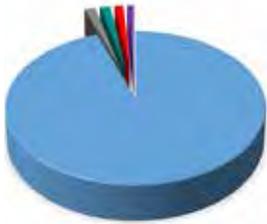
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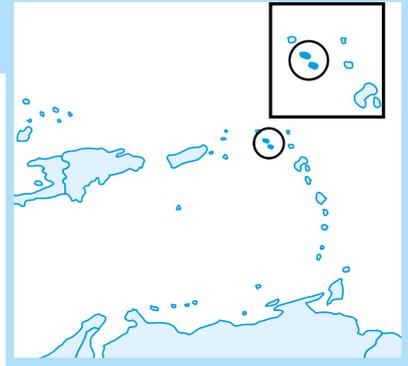
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ST KITTS AND NEVIS

RELIGION



- Christians: 94,6%
- Agnostics: 1,6%
- Hindus: 1,5%
- Spiritists: 1,3%
- Others: 1%



AREA
261km²

POPULATION
56.200

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the constitution¹ states that the nation has been established on the basis of belief in Almighty God.

The constitution states that everyone has fundamental rights and freedoms, irrespective of race, place of origin, birth, political opinions, colour, creed or sex, such as freedom of conscience, expression and association.² The right to conscientious objection to military service is recognised.

No-one can be denied the right to freedom of conscience, which includes freedom of thought and religion, freedom to change one's religion or belief and to manifest one's belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance, either individually or collectively, in public or in private.

Every religious community is entitled, at its own expense, to establish and manage their own places of education.

No one may be compelled or coerced into taking an oath against, or in a manner contrary to, their beliefs or religion.

Incidents

No violations of freedom of religion were reported in the period under review. The relationship between the Churches and the government improved through close collaboration in the task of rehabilitating the country following the disastrous Hurricane Irma. In September 2017, Prime Minister Timothy Harris congratulated the Churches for working with the authorities in the wake of the hurricane.³ The clergy, in cooperation with the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, issued a "call to prayer" that was broadcast on radio. The Prime Minister said that it was well-needed initiative and congratulated the religious community for the role they played.

Prospects for freedom of religion

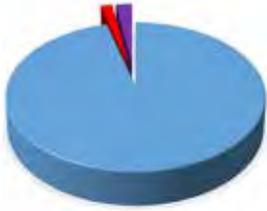
During the period under review, there were no reports of intolerance or outright persecution on religious grounds. In the absence of incidents in recent years, we may conclude that there is no change with respect to the previous period. Prospects for the future are positive.

Endnotes

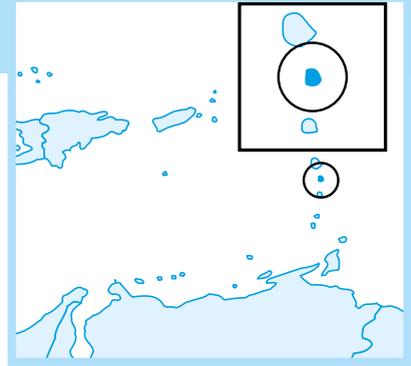
- ¹ All articles cited are from Saint Kitts and Nevis's Constitution of 1983, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org), https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/St_Kitts_and_Nevis_1983.pdf?lang=en (accessed 22nd March 2018).
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ST LUCIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 95,9%
- Spiritists: 1,7%
- Others: 2,4%



AREA
539km²

POPULATION
186.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the constitution¹ states that the people of Saint Lucia affirm their faith in the supremacy of Almighty God. They believe that everyone was created equal by God, with inalienable rights and dignity. They recognise that the enjoyment of these rights depends on certain fundamental freedoms such as freedom of the individual, thought, expression, communication, conscience and association. They realise that human dignity requires respect for spiritual values.

The constitution specifies that everyone has certain fundamental rights and freedoms, whatever their race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed or sex, subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the public interest. It recognises the right to personal freedom, equality before the law, as well as freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association.

Conscientious objection to military service is recognised.

No person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his or her freedom of conscience: including freedom of thought and religion, the freedom to change one's religion or belief, the freedom to manifest one's belief, alone or with others, in public or in private, in worship, teaching, practice or observance.

Except with their consent (or that of their parents or guardian in case of minors under 18 years of age), no one attending a place of education or held in prison or serving in the Armed Forces can be required to receive religious instruction or take part in or attend a religious ceremony that is not of the religion they profess.

Each religious community has the right to establish and maintain, at their own expense, places of education. They also have the right to provide religious instruction to the members of their organisations irrespective of whether or not they receive a government subsidy.

No one may be compelled or coerced into taking an oath against, or in a manner contrary to, their beliefs or religion.

Furthermore, no one shall be treated in a discriminatory manner by any person or authority. Discrimination means providing different or special treatment, totally or partially, to people based on their sex, race, place of origin, political opinion or affiliation, colour or creed. Ministers of religion cannot be elected to the Senate or the House of Assembly.

Incidents

Based on information from government sources, churches and local media, there are no reports of intolerance, discrimination or persecution on religious grounds.

Prospects for freedom of religion

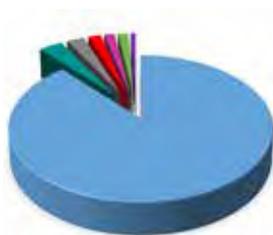
Similar to the previous reporting period, there were no incidents of note between 2016 and 2018. Hence, the situation has not changed and thus the prospects for freedom of religion remain positive.

Endnotes

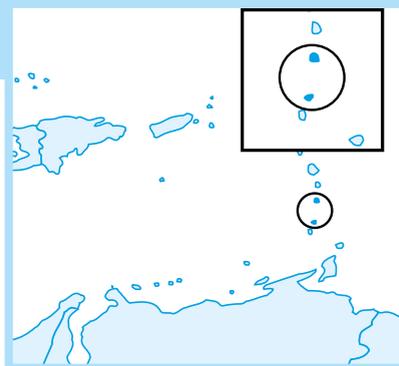
- ¹ Constitution of Saint Lucia (Chapter 1:01), Government of Saint Lucia, <http://www.govt.lc/media.govt.lc/www/resources/legislation/ConstitutionOfSaintLucia.pdf> (accessed 3rd March 2018).

ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

RELIGION



●	Christians: 88,6%
●	Hindus: 3,4%
●	Agnostics: 2,5%
●	Spiritists: 1,8%
●	Baha'is: 1,5%
●	Muslims: 1,5%
●	Others: 0,7%



AREA
389km²

POPULATION
110.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In its preamble, the constitution¹ states that the nation is founded on belief in the supremacy of God and the dignity of man.

In article one, the constitution specifies that everyone has certain fundamental rights and freedoms, such as freedom of conscience, irrespective of race, place of origin, birth, political opinions, colour, creed or sex, subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others.

Freedom of conscience, thought, religion and worship are inviolable rights in all areas, according to article nine, including teaching, practice and religious observance, whether alone or with others, in public or in private.

According to article nine, except with their consent, no one attending a place of education, in prison or doing their military service shall be required to receive religious instruction or attend religious ceremonies other than those of their own religion.

Each religious community has, according to article nine, the right to establish and maintain their own educational institutions.

Finally, article nine declares that no one may be compelled or coerced into taking an oath against, or in a manner contrary to, their beliefs or religion.

Article 26 states that no minister of religion can be elected or appointed as a representative or senator.

A Code of Conduct was issued in 2010 for upcoming general elections. Candidates for the presidency are required to uphold the highest moral principles in accordance with Christian ethics and are not allowed to use religion to mobilise the support of any individual. They must also respect times when church services are held and not disrupt public worship.²

The Education Bill of 2006 regulates religious matters in education.³ Religious education must be part of the curriculum of every public or private school. If a private school is owned or operated by a religious organisation and admits students who do not share its beliefs, the latter may not be required to receive religious instruction or take part in religious ceremonies.

Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost Monday and Christmas are national holidays.⁴

Incidents

In October 2017, the Thusian Institute for Religious Liberty thanked and congratulated the country for defending the right to freedom of religion, as part of 38th anniversary of the island's independence.⁵

According to government sources, churches and local media, there have been no reports of intolerance, discrimination or persecution connected to religious beliefs.

Prospects for freedom of religion

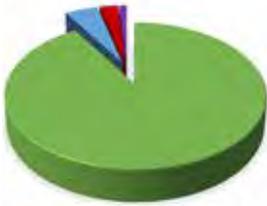
Prospects for freedom of religion in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are positive. In common with the 2016 report, no incidents have been reported.

Endnotes

- 1 All the articles cited are from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines's Constitution of 1979, [constituteproject.org, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/St_Vincent_and_the_Grenadines_1979.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/St_Vincent_and_the_Grenadines_1979.pdf?lang=en), (accessed 31st March 2018).
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SUDAN

RELIGION



● Muslims: 91,3%
● Christians: 4,9%
● Ethnoreligionists: 2,7%
● Others: 1,1%



AREA	POPULATION²
1.886.068km ²	41.176.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Known as the “Interim National Constitution”, Sudan’s temporary constitution remains in place years after the signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the creation of the independent state of South Sudan in 2011. The central position of ethnic and religious diversity in Sudan is set out in the preamble and article 1. Religious rights are spelt out in detail in article 6.¹

The sombre political atmosphere following the establishment of South Sudan has resulted in a shift towards less religious tolerance. This change in attitude is reflected primarily in the behaviour of rulers and politicians,² though recent constitutional amendments award the National Intelligence and Security Services extended powers which could be used to limit freedom of religion in Sudan.³

Despite the right to religious freedom expressed in the constitution, issues including conversion, apostasy, blasphemy, proselytism and other “religious offences” are very much areas of concern for the government and legislators of Sudan. Penalties for blasphemy under the criminal code have been recently increased.⁴ Apostasy, conversion to Islam, religious discrimination and other areas of religious controversy rarely reach a constitutional court; they are rather handled by subordinate levels of judicature and they are tried in accordance with laws and practices based on Islamic jurisprudence.⁵ This leaves those suspected of acting against Islamic norms largely unprotected in legal terms, with little access to impartial courts of law.

The Ministry of Education requires a minimum of 15 students in any class providing Christian instruction. Since the establishment of South Sudan, this number is rarely attained, so Christian students have to resort to extra-curricular religious instruction provided by their own churches.⁶ There is the suspicion that the regime exploits internal divisions or dissident tendencies within minority religious groups in order to weaken consolidated churches and congregations, particularly in the case of conflicts related to church-owned real estate assets.⁷

Sudan has often been defined as a “militia state”, notorious for the expedite arrest of citizens on charges including indecency and disturbance of public order, charges easily

made against individuals considered a threat to the government such as political dissidents, activists, journalists, religious or political leaders, etc. Armed forces and security agencies have often been accused of arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial killings, torture and ill-treatment of detainees.⁸ Violations of human rights seem particularly flagrant in those regions still affected by armed conflict, namely Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile.

Sudan has strong ties to Salafist jihadi groups linked to Al-Qaida or the Islamic State. They have freedom of action and unhindered access to media.⁹

Human rights organisations confirm that the government of Sudan continues to discriminate and oppress groups on religious grounds,¹⁰ as though they were a threat to social cohesion or security. Frequently targeted are members of Christian churches based in the Nuba Mountains, a disputed region populated by insurgency groups demanding independence. Some Muslim groups, especially Shia and Qur'anist congregations, are also under the close surveillance of security agencies.¹¹ On a positive note, in April 2018, apparently due to external and internal pressure, President Al-Bashir issued a public order releasing political detainees.¹²

In July 2017 the Ministry of Education of Khartoum state issued an order preventing Christian schools from holding classes on Saturdays and imposing on them the "Muslim weekend" of Friday and Saturday opposed to the usual weekend of Friday and Sunday permitted hitherto in such educational institutions.¹³ Despite objections from different Christian groups, this regulation continues, disrupting the timetable of many Church schools.

This and some other issues related to religious freedom were broached during the visit of the US Deputy Secretary of State, John Sullivan, in November 2017.¹⁴ This visit took place soon after the historical lifting of US sanctions on Sudan on 6th October 2017, bringing to an end a 20-year period of embargo, and after the current US administration eliminated Sudan from the list of countries affected by travel restrictions into US Territory.¹⁵

In March 2018, the president of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church flew to Khartoum and met with government officials to thank them for their official recognition of the Adventist Church.¹⁶ Entry visas to Christian missionaries have been issued more generously than in the years previous to 2017.¹⁷

Incidents

In August 2016 Sudan's criminal court opened a case against three pastors (two Sudanese and one Czech national) and one Sudanese activist, charged with conspiracy against the state, espionage and entering/photographing military areas.¹⁸ This case was adjourned several times and on 29th January 2017, the activist and one pastor were sentenced to 12 years imprisonment; the other Sudanese had been released previously while the Czech pastor was sentenced to life imprisonment. He was pardoned and released by the Government one month later, while the other two co-convicted were pardoned in May 2017.¹⁹

Dr Mudawi Ibrahim, a renowned and internationally recognised human rights activist, founder and former director of the Sudan Social Development Organisation (SUDO), was arrested on 7th December 2016, charged with several acts against the state and the constitutional order. His arrest came at a time when 23 other opposition activists were also imprisoned. After several delays of his court case, all charges against him were dropped. He was pardoned and released in August 2017.²⁰

Early in 2017, Christian leaders complained to the government about anti-Christian posters printed by radical Muslim groups and posted in different parts of the capital promoting a boycott on Christian celebrations.²¹

In February 2017, the Sudanese government announced its intention to demolish 25 churches. The Sudanese government was questioned about this by an EU representative.²²

As a result of an internal wrangle concerning Church-owned real state, a Church elder trying to prevent some women from being beaten was stabbed to death in April 2017.²³

Two offices and a temple belonging to the Sudan Church of Christ, mainly attended by Christians from the Nuba Mountains, were destroyed on 7th May 2017 in the Soba Aradi district of Khartoum.²⁴

A man who requested to be registered as “non-religious” rather than “Muslim” at the civil registry was arrested under the legislation on apostasy (Article 126 of the Sudanese Criminal Code). He was later released on the grounds that he was “mentally incompetent to stand trial”.²⁵

Two pastors belonging to the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church were evicted from their homes in Omdurman in August 2017.²⁶

A Church belonging to the Sudanese Church of Christ in Al-Thawra was closed and five persons affiliated with it arrested in October 2017.²⁷

An Evangelical church in Al Hajj Jousif, a suburb of Khartoum, was destroyed in February 2018 despite documents that showed it had been in Church ownership since 1989.²⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

Comprehensive sanctions against the country were lifted at the end of 2017 and Sudanese citizens can travel again without undue restrictions. Having survived a 20-year embargo, Sudan is now extremely eager to be removed from the US list of countries supporting international terrorism. The West may exploit the possibility of this change in status to force the Sudanese regime to grant broader freedoms to its citizens and bring about social and legal changes to enable religious, cultural and political diversity within society.²⁹

Should the US and the international community succeed in implementing an effective monitoring on the performance of civil freedoms, and should they be capable of applying diplomatic and political pressure on the government, some positive developments might materialise. Otherwise, given the history and the defiant character of the Sudanese

government, it is unlikely that the regime will bring about any significant improvements regarding violations of religious freedom in Sudan.

Endnotes

- 1 'Sudan 2005', www.constituteproject.org, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Sudan_2005?lang=en (accessed 29th April 2018).
- 2 A reflection of such change is the ban issued in July 2014 on construction of churches, issued by the Minister for Guidance and Religious Endowments, Shalil Abdullah. Cf. 'Sudan confirms ban on church building', Independent Catholic News, 16th July 2014, <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=25176> (accessed 5th May 2018)
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- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Cf. Dr. Suliman Baldo, 'Radical Intolerance: Sudan's Religious Oppression and Embrace of Extremist Groups', Report by Enough Project, https://enoughproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/SudanReligiousFreedom_Enough_Dec2017_final.pdf, 12th December 2017, page 6 (accessed 6th May 2018).
- 8 'HRW 2018 World Report – Sudan', Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/sudan#ada87c> (accessed 1st May 2018); '292 political detainees still in Sudan prisons: activists', Radio Dabanga, 17th April 2018, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/292-political-detainees-still-in-sudan-prisons-activists> (accessed 1st May 2018).
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- 10 Cf. 'Expansion of the religious discrimination against Christians in Sudan', Sudan Democracy First Group (Press Release), 8th April 2017, <https://us7.campaign-archive.com/?u=7acabab6ae470b89628f88514&i-d=c8e9ad21d8&e=a9db638c83> (accessed 28th April 2018); 'HRW 2018 World Report – Sudan', Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/sudan#ada87c> (accessed 1st May 2018).
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- 13 'Sudan's church schools ordered to follow Muslim week', Radio Dabanga, 28th July 2017, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-s-church-schools-ordered-to-follow-muslim-week> (accessed 26th April 2018). Though this is not explicitly mentioned in the text of news article, this order applies only to Khartoum state, since it was issued by the Ministry of Education of Khartoum state. (Source: local church representative); Abdur Rahman Alfa Shaban, 'Sudan orders Christian-minority to open schools on Sundays', Africanews, 29th July 2017, <http://www.africanews.com/2017/07/29/sudan-orders-christian-minority-to-open-schools-on-sundays/> (accessed 26th April 2018).
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- 15 Carol Morello, 'U.S. lifts sanctions on Sudan, ending two decades of embargo', The Washington Post, 6th October 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-lifts-sanctions-on-sudan-ending-two-decades-of-embargo/2017/10/06/aac1bd22-86d5-434e-9a21-1e0d57a72cb0_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.64de9501a05c (accessed 6th May 2018).

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SURINAME

RELIGION



- Christians: 50,9%
- Hindus: 20,5%
- Muslims: 15,9%
- Agnostics: 4,7%
- Spiritists: 3%
- Ethnoreligionists: 2%
- Others: 3%



AREA	POPULATION
163.820km ²	548.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In the preamble of the constitution¹, the people of Suriname acknowledge that, inspired by the love for their country and the belief in “the power of the Almighty”, it is their “duty to honour and guarantee the principles of freedom, equality and democracy, as well as the rights and fundamental freedoms of man”.

The constitution states in article eight that no one may be discriminated against on the basis of birth, sex, race, language, religion, education, political opinion, economic position or any other status.

Everyone has, according to the constitution, the right to personal freedom, freedom of religion and philosophy of life, peaceful association and assembly, and the protection of moral integrity in the areas of public order, security, and health as provided by the law.

Where rights and freedoms are violated, article 10 states that people have the right to file a complaint before an independent and impartial judge.

Workers’ rights are guaranteed by article 28 without discrimination because of age, sex, race, nationality, religion, or political beliefs.

Conscientious objection is accepted by article 180 as grounds for refusing compulsory military service.

Religious organisations must register with the Ministry of the Interior if they want financial support from the government. To register, they must provide contact information, group history or organisation, and the address of their places of worship. They can apply for financial support from the government to pay for the salaries of their clergy or for projects “of a moral nature”.²

Religious education is not allowed in state schools. The government funds teachers’ salaries and provides a stipend to cover maintenance costs to schools run by various religious groups.³

The Penal Code punishes those who publicly, and by any means, instigate or promote discrimination based on religion or creed.⁴

Good Friday, Easter, Diwali and Christmas are national holidays.⁵

Incidents

Information from government sources, churches and local media showed no evidence of intolerance, discrimination or persecution on religious grounds.

Prospects for freedom of religion

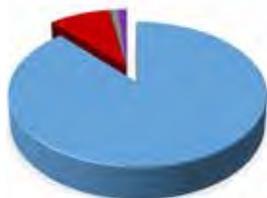
The prospects for religious freedom in Suriname are positive. With respect to the period under review, there were no episodes of intolerance. Thus, we can conclude that the situation of freedom of religion has not changed since 2016.

Endnotes

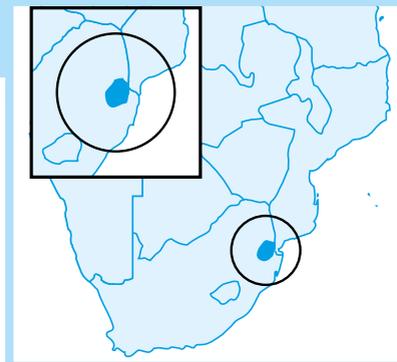
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SWAZILAND (eSWATINI)

RELIGION



- Christians: 90%
- Ethnoreligionists: 9,1%
- Agnostics: 1,2%
- Others: 1,3%



AREA
17.363km²

POPULATION²
1.304.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Officially renamed the “Kingdom of eSwatini” in April 2018 by King Mswati III, Africa’s last absolute monarch, the small, landlocked country of Swaziland has increasingly become a haven for refugees from other parts of the continent.¹ Most of the displaced persons come from East Africa.² Swaziland has also become a temporary – or even permanent – home for people from the neighbouring countries of Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Because of its proximity to the large and economically strong South Africa, Swaziland is a favourite destination for waves of refugees waiting for a chance to cross the border. At the same time, the situation of immigrants in Swaziland worsened considerably following an extreme drought in 2015–2016. Almost all of the countries of southern Africa were hit by the drought and in some regions suffered poor or failed harvests. The negative consequences of the natural disaster are still noticeable.

Swaziland has great religious diversity but the vast majority of the population are Christians. As well as Protestant, Anglican and Catholic communities, there are independent African Churches. These are organised in the Council of Swaziland Churches (CSC).³ Around 40 percent of the population are believed to profess a mix of Christian and traditional African religious rites. In Swaziland, this hybrid form is referred to as African Zionism.⁴

The 2005 constitution of Swaziland recognises and protects freedom of religion. Section 20 (Sub-section 2) of the constitution states: “[...] a person shall not be discriminated against on the grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, or social or economic standing, political opinion, age or disability.”⁵ As Sub-section 3 clarifies: to “discriminate” means to give different treatment to different persons.” Section 23 (Sub-section 1) includes the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The constitution also protects the “freedom of worship either alone or in community with others”.

The right to practise non-Christian religions is protected by traditional laws and customs as interpreted by the traditional courts and the 360 village chiefs. In their communities, the chiefs are empowered to advocate on behalf of a particular form of belief if this is linked to local traditions.⁶

Religious groups seeking to build new places of worship in cities are required to obtain the approval of the authorities. In rural areas, this is subject to the permission of the village chiefs.⁷ Communities that define themselves as Christian must register with one of the three national, non-denominational associations: League of Churches, Swaziland Conference of Churches or Council of Swaziland Churches. The communities can subsequently receive a recommendation for state registration and register with the Ministry of Justice.⁸ The Council of Swaziland Churches comprises Anglicans, Catholics (as observers), Mennonites, Episcopalians and Methodists.⁹ The League of Churches represents the Zionist Church and the other independent, African churches.¹⁰ The Swaziland Conference of Churches represents the Evangelicals.¹¹ The three organisations work together in rural development projects and general mission matters.

Religious education is a compulsory subject in the primary schools of Swaziland and an elective in secondary schools.¹² The curriculum provides for the inclusion of all faiths. However, all religious instruction taught in schools is from a Christian perspective. Muslims have complained about this.¹³ The only religious youth groups permitted in schools are Christian. In many state-run schools, groups of volunteers conduct public prayers and liturgical celebrations. Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day and Christmas Day are among the country's official holidays.¹⁴

Many of the organised Christian religious activities are supported by the government and the country's royal family. State radio and television broadcast Christian religious programming. Non-Christian groups have protested as they are not granted any airtime.¹⁵

Incidents

There have been isolated reports of religious discrimination in Swaziland. These particularly affect non-Christian groups in rural areas. The country's two major newspapers – the state-owned Swazi Observer and the independent Times of Swaziland – have repeatedly published comments calling for the abolition of Muslim-run businesses operating in rural areas by people who are relatively recent immigrants, in order to make room for local ethnic Swazis.¹⁶ Relations between different faith groups has come under strain in times of economic hardship.

The role of the royal family of Swaziland has not gone unchallenged. King Mswati III has been criticised for promoting the construction of a large church in the traditional capital city of Lobamba (large-scale religious observances in Swaziland were previously celebrated in stadiums).¹⁷ The newsweekly African Independent estimates the cost of building the cathedral, which would provide seating for 30,000 worshippers, at the equivalent of around US\$157 million.¹⁸ Activists are critical of calls for local fund-raising to support the project. According to Sibusiso Nhlabatsi, of Swaziland Lawyers for Human Rights, a majority of the population of Swaziland rely on foreign aid.

Prospects for freedom of religion

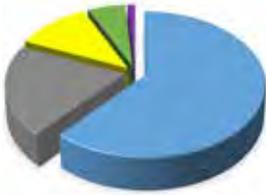
There is no current threat to religious freedom but tension is resulting from political and economic factors. The government's increasingly repressive policies towards the opposition and the country's continuing economic difficulties do give cause for concern. The human rights situation in the country, which has been the object of international criticism, includes disproportionate use of force by state security operatives, extrajudicial killings, and inadequate state protection for vulnerable groups such as women, children, and people with disabilities.¹⁹ It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that these developments will undermine relations between religious communities which hitherto have been largely peaceful.

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SWEDEN

RELIGION



● Christians: 61,4%
● Agnostics: 20,1%
● Atheists: 11,5%
● Muslims: 5,8%
● Others: 1,2%



AREA	POPULATION
438.574km ²	9.852.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution of the Kingdom of Sweden guarantees freedom of religion.¹ It prohibits discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation² and, under the Swedish Discrimination Act, complaints may be filed with the Discrimination Ombudsman.³

Recognition or registration of groups is not required to carry out religious activities and faith communities are taxed similarly to non-profit organisations. Religious groups officially recognised by the Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities (SST) may, however, raise revenues by collecting contributions through the tax agency and receiving publicly funded grants.⁴

Hate speech laws prohibit threats or expressions of contempt for persons based on religious belief.⁵ Police maintain statistics on hate crimes, including religiously motivated hate crimes and the National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) is responsible for the production of hate crime data.⁶

Instruction covering all world religions is required in all public and private schools. Religious groups are permitted to establish private schools, provided they meet state curriculum requirements.⁷ Home schooling, including for religious reasons, is not permitted except under "extraordinary circumstances".⁸

On 13th March 2018 the governing Swedish Social Democrats proposed a ban on all independent religious schools.⁹

There are legal restrictions on both animal slaughter and circumcision of males.¹⁰

In 2016 the government appointed a Special Envoy to combat anti-Semitism and Islamophobia based at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs¹¹ and in November 2016 released a "national plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility, and hate crimes".¹²

Incidents

With respect to reports of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim activity, it should be noted that,

because ethnicity and religion are often closely linked, it might be difficult to determine whether an incident is motivated by racism, political conflicts, or by religious intolerance.

Official 2016 figures reported to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) include 264 crimes which were motivated by bias against Christians (32 physical assault; 92 cases of damage to property; 130 disturbances of the peace; 10 unspecified). There were five submissions by civil society groups about incidents against Christians (multiple incidents in which Christian refugees were threatened while residing in reception centres and accommodations; three incidents involving damage to property).¹³

According to a 2017 survey by Open Doors, Christian refugees and new arrivals in Sweden experienced religiously motivated violence and discrimination, mainly at the hands of Muslim fellow refugees.¹⁴

The Swedish Migration Board was criticised for administering “Christianity tests” to asylum seekers who based their asylum claims on their conversion from Islam to Christianity.¹⁵ In July 2017 the government’s Migration Board rejected a Christian convert’s asylum claim despite acknowledging that conversion is a crime for which she would likely be punished upon deportation to Iran.¹⁶

Attacks on Christian buildings included a man who, shouting “Allahu Akbar”, smashed stained-glass windows in a church in central Malmö in June 2016,¹⁷ repeated vandalism against a Catholic church in Karlstad in August 2016,¹⁸ Islamic State graffiti on a Catholic church in Västerås in May 2017¹⁹ and an arson attack against a Catholic church in Luleå in July 2017.²⁰

According to the 2016 Hate Crime Reporting database, officials recorded 122 anti-Semitic hate crimes (10 physical attacks, 18 cases of damage to property, 90 disturbances of the peace and four unspecified). Civil society groups reported one incident (a bomb threat against a synagogue).²¹

In April 2017, a Jewish association in Umeå announced it would close after repeated vandalism with swastikas and threatening messages by the neo-Nazi group Nordfront.²² In response, the Anti-Defamation League expressed concern about inadequate security for Jewish institutions across Sweden and urged the Prime Minister to protect them.²³

In reaction to US President Donald Trump’s December 2017 decision to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, protests in Malmö included violent anti-Semitic slogans. The spokesperson for the city’s Jewish community said there “is a latent threat against Jews in Malmö, and when things heat up in the Middle East that threat becomes more real”.²⁴

Within a few days of the December 2017 demonstrations, a Gothenburg synagogue was the victim of a Molotov cocktail attack²⁵ and burning objects were thrown at a Jewish cemetery in Malmö.²⁶ The Conference of European Rabbis requested a meeting with the Swedish Prime Minister over rising anti-Semitism in Sweden.²⁷

The 2016 Hate Crime Reporting database provides official figures of 330 crimes motivated by anti-Muslim bias (38 physical assaults, 64 cases of damage to property, 220 disturbances of the peace, and eight unspecified).²⁸ There were no incidents reported by civil society groups.²⁹

There were multiple attacks on Islamic places of worship during the period under review. Daesh (ISIS) took responsibility for the arson at a Malmö Shi'a mosque in October 2016.³⁰ In November 2016, unidentified individuals burst into a mosque in Stockholm and spray-painted swastikas on the walls and threw firecrackers.³¹

In April 2017, Sweden's largest Shi'a mosque, the Imam Ali Islamic Centre in a Stockholm suburb, was the victim of an arson attack.³² In September 2017, a mosque in Orebro was heavily damaged by arson.³³ In December 2017, the Islamic Cultural Centre near Karlstad was attacked with a home-made bomb, with windows broken and walls hit with explosives reinforced with pellets.³⁴ A Stockholm mosque was vandalised with swastika graffiti in January 2018.³⁵

Uzbek national Rakhmat Akilov, 39, was charged with committing a terrorist crime and intent to "run over unbelievers" after pleading guilty to stealing a truck and running over people in a busy shopping district in Stockholm.³⁶ Five people were killed and 15 people were injured in the attack in April 2017. Uzbekistan stated that it had notified the West about Akilov, indicating that he had been radicalised after moving to Sweden in 2014. Hours after the truck attack, a Somali Muslim taxi driver in Stockholm was assaulted by a man who blamed the incident on Sweden's "openness to Muslim immigrants".³⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

While it appears that there were no significant new or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom in Sweden during the period under review, there appears to be an increased risk of societal intolerance against both majority and minority religions, some of which may be as a result of global terrorism or geopolitical conflicts attributed to religious groups, as well as anti-immigration sentiments in Sweden.

Endnotes

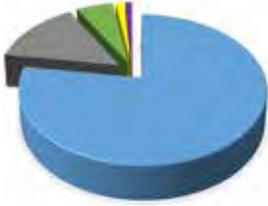
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SWITZERLAND

RELIGION



- Christian: 77,5%
- Agnostics: 14,4%
- Muslims: 5,7%
- Atheists: 1,4%
- Others: 1%



AREA
41.291km²

POPULATION
8.379.000

SWITZERLAND

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 15 of the constitution ensures freedom of religion and conscience, and Article 8 inter alia prohibits discrimination based on religion or belief.¹

The 26 cantons (member states of the Swiss Confederation) have the opportunity to define relationships between religions and the local government.² For this reason, regulations and requirements for religious registration and activity may differ across the country.

Religious groups are not required by law to register, but if they do, they must do so as public entities on the basis of certain criteria, including recognising the right to religious freedom, organising themselves along democratic lines, respecting the cantonal constitution and financial transparency.³

Religious communities may also register as private entities in the cantons of Basel, Zurich, and Vaud.⁴ This gives recognised religious communities the right to provide education about their faith in state schools.

Registration in the cantonal commercial registry is not required of religious groups. However, as of 1st January 2016, religious foundations⁵ must register in the commercial registry.

There are mandatory Church Taxes for registered Church members. With the exception of the Geneva, Neuchatel, Ticino, and Vaud cantons, all other cantons require businesses to pay taxes that go to support at least one of four religious communities – Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish.⁶ In Ticino, Neuchatel and Geneva the Church Tax is voluntary. The canton of Vaud does not collect a Church Tax; however, the cantonal budget provides subsidies for Protestant and Roman Catholic communities.⁷

Rules allowing tax-exempt status for a religious group vary from canton to canton. It is common in the majority of cantons for religious communities that receive cantonal financial support to obtain tax-exempt status automatically. Religious communities usually need to apply for tax-exempt status with the cantonal government.

Proselytising by foreign religious groups is allowed if the foreign missionary has met the requirements to enter the country and, if necessary, obtained a religious worker visa to work in Switzerland.⁸

There are specific visa requirements, which may include but are not limited to proof of the following:⁹

- no citizen shall be displaced from their job by the applicant;
- formal completion of theological training;
- financial support by the host organisation;
- willingness to attend mandatory integration courses;
- a proportional balance of the number of the organisation's religious workers to the number of religious workers from the cantonally-recognised religious communities.

To obtain a work permit, the applicant must "have sufficient knowledge of, respect for and understanding of national customs and culture; be conversant in at least one of the three main national languages; and hold a degree in theology".¹⁰ If an applicant is unable to meet these requirements, the government may deny their residency and work permits.

Residency and work permits are to be refused according to the law if a background check reveals that an individual has participated in preaching hate or has ties to a radicalised religious group, or is someone whom the government considers to be fundamentalist and a risk to internal security or public order.

Religious education¹¹ is taught in most public cantonal schools, except for those in Geneva and Neuchatel. The classes are either mandatory or voluntary depending on the canton; however, if mandatory, parents may request waivers, which are typically granted.

Incidents

A ban on face coverings in Ticino went into effect on 1st July 2016. Under the ban, Muslim women are not allowed to wear a burqa or niqab. Those found in violation of the law are liable to fines of between 100 francs (US\$102) and 1,000 francs (US\$1,016), and 10,000 francs (US\$10,170) for a second offence. About six people, five of whom are Muslim women, have been fined since the ban took effect.¹²

On 28th November 2017, the St Gallen cantonal parliament approved a bill to ban face coverings in public. Under the new law, potential violations would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, looking at whether the person whose face was covered presented a "security risk or threaten[ed] social or religious peace".¹³

An initiative to have a national face-covering ban was rejected in March 2017.¹⁴

A case that was first raised in 2013 was brought to a conclusion in January 2017; in the European Court of Human Rights case *Osmanoglu and Kocabas v. Switzerland* (no. 29086/12),¹⁵ the applicants submitted to the European Court of Human Rights that the

obligation to send their daughters to mixed-sex swimming classes, as part of their compulsory schooling in the canton of Basle-City, was contrary to their religious convictions. They also claimed that the fine imposed on them for failing to comply with that obligation had no valid legal basis, did not pursue a legitimate aim and was disproportionate. In its 10th January 2017 judgement, the court held that there had been no violation of Article 9 in that government had not gone beyond the considerable margin of appreciation (or margin of state discretion) allowed to ensure that the compulsory school curriculum was followed and to facilitate integration. While the court said that the refusal to grant an exemption did interfere with their right to manifest their religion, the interference was lawful and pursued a legitimate aim, especially considering the importance of schooling in aiding successful integration. It also considered that the authorities had tried to find an arrangement that would respect religious convictions while also fulfilling the curriculum.

In November 2016, Switzerland's Federal Court affirmed the decisions of a lower court in Zurich, denying an operating permit for an Islamic kindergarten to the Al Huda Islamic foundation. Its decision was based on the institution's religious curriculum which did not meet local regulations for private schools.

In 2016, about 24 anti-Semitic incidents were documented by the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG) and the Foundation Against Racism and Antisemitism (GRA). The report, *Anti-Semitism Report 2016: Threats, attempted blackmail, assaults*, details some of the incidents that occurred in the German-speaking part of the country. These incidents include neo-Nazi concerts, death threats and other anti-Semitic behaviour.

In 2017, the government condemned a hotel that posted a sign at their pool stating, "To our Jewish Guests, women, men and children, please take a shower before you go swimming," the sign said, adding, "If you break the rules I'm forced to (close) the swimming pool for you."¹⁶

A banner showing a swastika was removed by police on the A3 motorway near Reichenburg heading toward Zurich in July 2017.¹⁷ Such symbols are still legal in the country after a 2010 decision by the government not to prohibit the Hitler salute and Nazi symbols.¹⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

Switzerland remains a country that upholds religious freedom while balancing humanistic and democratic values. The recent court rulings further reinforce these principles; however, an eye should be kept on the underlying motivations behind the decision to ensure that all religious communities, besides Muslims, are held to the same standards. While some Muslim representatives note that societal discrimination against their community is a reflection of broader intolerance towards foreigners, many Muslims feel they suffer discrimination to a greater degree than other religious groups.

It is important for the government to continue to formally denounce any anti-Muslim or anti-Semitic acts.

Private initiatives are being taken to promote inter-religious harmony. The House of Religions which opened in 2014 and offers prayer rooms for five religious communities: Christians, Alevi, Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim.¹⁹

In a contribution to religious literacy, the Centre Intercantonal d'Information sur les Croyances (CIC) created in Geneva several years ago and financed by four cantons keeps a database of several hundred religious or belief groups in the country. It also has an interactive map of 400 religious communities and 270 religious places in Geneva.²⁰

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RELIGION



- Muslims: 93,3%
- Christians: 4,6%
- Agnostics: 2%
- Others: 0,1%



AREA	POPULATION
185.180km ²	18.564.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In March 2011, following anti-government demonstrations in Syria, protesters clashed with forces from the government of President Bashar Al-Assad. The violence spiralled into a full civil war by the summer when the opposition started to become militarised. With the intervention of regional powers –notably Iran and Saudi Arabia – and international ones – the USA and Russia – the conflict became, according to many observers, a proxy war. Accurate figures are very hard to obtain because of the inaccessibility of many areas and conflicting statistics given by different parties. That said, a 2016 UN report estimated the death toll at around 400,000.¹

As a result of the fighting, most of the country’s infrastructure has been destroyed, and half of the population has been displaced either inside or outside the country. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre,² Syria’s refugee crisis is the largest in the world, with 2.9 million displaced people in 2017 alone, the highest figure globally. In June 2016, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that Syria had a record 4.9 million refugees by the end of 2015, more than two million above second-placed Afghanistan.

Most Syrians are Sunni Muslims. Alawites, Christians and Druze are part of the country’s traditional religious mosaic. Kurds are the most important non-Arab ethnic group. Most of them adhere to Sunni Islam. Since 2011 the situation of religious freedom has sharply deteriorated. Before the war, Christians comprised a significant portion of the population, about 10 percent. Most of them belong to Eastern Churches, such as the Melkite Greek Catholic Church and the Syriac Orthodox Church. Church leaders have praised the atmosphere of tolerance that existed before the war. Because the Christians were concentrated in strategically important zones affected by war, they have fled in large numbers; many have been displaced internally and others fled abroad as refugees.

President Assad is an Alawite, an off-shoot of Islam held in contempt by a number of main-stream groups – “many Sunnis call Alawites heretics”.³ However, in the time of Assad’s father, President Hafez Al-Allsad, a 1974 fatwa by Shia scholar Musa Al-Sadr recognised the Alawite community as a branch of Shia Islam.

According to article three of Syria's constitution⁴, approved by a referendum in 2012 (in force only in government-held areas), "The religion of the President of the Republic is Islam; Islamic jurisprudence shall be a major source of legislation; the State shall respect all religions, and ensure the freedom to perform all the rituals that do not prejudice public order; the personal status of religious communities shall be protected and respected." Article eight forbids "Carrying out any political activity or forming any political parties or groupings on the basis of religious, sectarian, tribal, regional, class-based, professional, or on discrimination based on gender, origin, race or colour". Article 33 states: "Citizens shall be equal in rights and duties without discrimination among them on grounds of sex, origin, language, religion or creed." Article 42 says, "Freedom of belief shall be protected in accordance with the law".

The government restricts proselytising and conversions. It prohibits the conversion of Muslims to other religions, deemed contrary to Shari'a. Although conversions from Islam to Christianity are not allowed, the government recognises Christian conversions to Islam. The penal code prohibits "causing tension between religious communities"⁵ Article 462 of Syria's Penal Code provides that anyone who publicly defames religious practices is punishable with up to two years' imprisonment.⁶

Matters involving personal status such as marriage and inheritance are regulated in accordance with each community's rules. Muslims are subject to Shari'a. Christians and other religious minorities come under their respective laws. There is no civil marriage. Muslim women cannot marry non-Muslim men, but Muslim men can marry women from another recognised religion.

Incidents

The UN-created Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights found that Sunni Muslims accounted for most civilian casualties and detainees, and that the Syrian government used the blockading of Sunni-majority opposition areas as a weapon of war.⁷ Because of the recruitment of foreign Shia fighters in countries including Afghanistan and Pakistan, Sunni communities have launched attacks on Shia communities in those countries, indicating that the Syrian conflict is exacerbating Sunni-Shia tensions elsewhere. Traditionally Sunni areas of Damascus, Homs and Deir-ez-Zor Province (eastern Syria) were reportedly being settled by Iranian, Iraqi, and Lebanese Shia fighters and their families. Some reports suggest that Christians in areas of Damascus, including Bab Tuma and Bab Sharqi, were pressured to sell to Iranians.⁸

Ismailis and Druze have been easy targets for armed groups, because of their concentration in certain areas. Both groups have also complained of government pressure to serve in the military. The regime has seized Ismaili and Druze men, aged 18 to 42, who resisted conscription, driving most of them out of the country.⁹

The presence of Islamist groups among the numerous opposition militias has caused major problems for the country's minority communities. For example, Al-Nusra Front –

subsequently renamed Fateh Al-Sham Front, which then merged with other groups to become Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham in early 2017– has been implicated in many of the atrocities against Christians during the course of the war including Ma'aloula and Sadad. The complex relations between different rebel groups have meant that the so-called moderate opposition militias have – whether intentionally or not – collaborated in the attacks on Christians. For example, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) fought alongside Al-Nusra to prevent Sadad being retaken in 2013 when the latter were committing war crimes against the town's Christian inhabitants. However, as the war has progressed there have been attempts by groups including the FSA to distance themselves from both Al-Nusra and Daesh (ISIS).¹⁰

Many members of religious minority groups held by Daesh are still missing, including 25 Christians. The liberation of Daesh-held territory in 2017 highlighted that some of Syria's most prominent Christian leaders are still missing, such as Italian Jesuit priest Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo Paul Yazigi, Armenian Catholic priest Father Michel Kayyal, and Greek Orthodox priest Father Maher Mahfouz.¹¹

In October 2017 Daesh seized a bus full of Druze travellers in Hama on their way from Damascus to Idlib. It initially held the 50 people as hostages but later released all but two, who it is suspected were killed.¹²

On 1st October 2017 Daesh militants retook Al-Qaryatayn, Homs Province, a town with a large Christian population. In the three weeks the extremists held Al-Qaryatayn before it was liberated by Syrian regime forces, Daesh executed 116 people.¹³ The town, home to 2,000 Christians before the rise of Daesh, had only a few hundred Christians by the time the extremists first took control of Al-Qaryatayn in August 2015, as many had fled in anticipation of the group's arrival. When Daesh first occupied the town, the militants took 200 Christians hostage until they agreed to pay the jizya tax, which is levied on non-Muslims. Payment would allow them to remain in the city, Daesh said.¹⁴

In May 2017, Daesh fighters launched attacks on Aqarib Al-Safiyah and Al-Manboujah, two villages in Hama Province inhabited predominantly by Ismailis, a minority Shia Muslim group, killing 52 people.¹⁵

In 2017, the Syrian government, along with its Russian and Iranian allies, recaptured much of the territory formerly under the control of opposition groups. As a result, fewer violations of religious freedom occurred in areas held by the armed opposition perpetrated than in previous years.

In general, all armed groups have violated human rights in the areas they control throughout the course of the conflict. For example in 2015, Al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Nusra forced the small Druze community in an area once controlled by Daesh to convert to Sunni Islam. In 2017, the Druze were unable to freely practise their religion and traditions.¹⁶

A January 2017 report by a coalition of mainly UK-based Christian charities working in Iraq and Syria asserted that it was "vital that Christians and other minority populations have support for their political and security concerns if they are to feel reassured enough to

return [...], rebuild their communities and undertake any reconciliation process".¹⁷ In an interview given to Hungary-based news agency BosNewsLife the same month, Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem Joseph III Younan, the leader of the Syriac Catholic Church, urged the West and the United Nations to end without delay sanctions against his country and to stop supporting rebels. He said: "I still hope that the Western countries, that means the Western politicians, would accept to stop financing and arming so-called rebels because there would be otherwise no end to the sectarian war."¹⁸

In March 2017, Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (Al-Nusra Front) carried out a double bomb attack in the car park of the Bab Al-Saghir cemetery, a well-known Shia pilgrimage site, killing 44 and wounding 120, mostly Shia pilgrims.¹⁹

Armed groups have kidnapped people for ransom or prisoner exchange with the government or other armed groups. As of September 2017, up to 100 men from the Damascus suburb of Adra Al-Omaliyah belonging to religious minority groups were still held as hostages.²⁰

In Kurdish-controlled areas, minority groups have complained of human rights abuses by Kurdish groups that de facto administer about 30 percent of north-eastern Syria. According to the Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights (AMHR), non-Kurdish communities in the area have reported demographic changes, including the displacement of Armenian and Assyrian Christians and Sunni Arab Muslims in favour of Kurds, and the imposition of Kurdish language and culture in some areas. The AMHR also noted growing pressure on private Christian schools in Al-Hasakeh Province to change their curriculum or risk being closed. Changes include teaching Kurdish, hiring Kurdish teachers, and learning the ideas of Abdallah Ocalan, the jailed leader of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), which the US has designated as a terrorist organisation.²¹

In September 2016 the Kurdish Peoples Protection Unit was accused of carrying out acts of violence and intimidation against Christians in Al-Hasakeh. Listing a numbers of incidents, Syriac Catholic Archbishop Jacques Behnan Hindo of Al-Hasakeh-Nisibi told Agenzia Fides that he believed the Kurds were planning to force out Christians. He said: "The epicentre of their raids and acts of force is always the area of the six churches, where most of the Christians live. In many cases they expelled the Christians from their homes under the threat of Kalashnikovs. And where they enter, they loot everything".²²

Christian community leaders have also complained that Kurdish authorities seized homes abandoned during fighting. In late 2017, under a new regulation, abandoned Christian homes in the city of Tabqa, Raqqa Province, were to be given to Kurdish families if their owners had not yet returned. Christians and Sunni Muslims have also accused the largely Kurdish Syrian Defence Forces of working with Kurdish authorities to sideline, discriminate against, and at times even attack non-Kurdish populations.²³

In December 2017, the World Watch Monitor news agency published an article on Christian families going back to the Syrian city of Homs five years after fleeing it. Despite "little incentive" to return, some of them were able to rebuild their homes²⁴. Many Christians interviewed for the article said that "the Middle East is no longer a home for [them]".²⁵

Interviewees insisted on the need for a “national accountability mechanism” to deal with incidents of religious and ethnic persecution and discrimination in Iraq and Syria, in order “to restore faith in a system that ensures all religious and ethnic communities are [treated] as equal citizens and deserving of protection, while also deterring negative actors from taking adverse actions against these communities.”²⁶

A new law introduced in April 2018 by President Bashar El-Assad, calling on Syrians to register their private properties with the Ministry of Local Administration within 30 days, could allow the government to seize the properties of displaced Syrians. As such, the law could be seen as part of a plan to change the demographics of Syria, settling Shias from Syria, Lebanon and Iraq in previously Sunni areas. It could also be seen as a way for the government and its allies to further pursue their strategic interests by creating Shia areas under their direct control.²⁷

From January to March 2018, bombs fired from rebel-held East Ghouta hit Christian areas of Damascus. This prompted Church sources in Syria to allege that these were targeted attacks, such as were seen during the repeated bombing of the Christian quarter of Aleppo. Maronite Archbishop Samir Nassar in Damascus was almost killed when a bomb landed in his bedroom in the Maronite Cathedral complex. He only survived because he had got up to use the bathroom shortly before the shell exploded. In Bab Touma, the Melkite Cathedral and Patriarchate on Straight Street, which is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, was hit. The nearby convent of Mary and Jesus in Bab Touma was hit twice.²⁸ Christians criticised the western media and other organisations for downplaying the casualties, which they stressed were occurring on both sides. Writing to the World Council of Churches (WCC) on 2nd March 2018 about the bombing of Damascus, Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II of the Syriac Orthodox Church wrote:

“You mention 550 victims killed in Eastern Ghouta... However, you neglect to mention hundreds of civilians including many children killed by the mortars and missiles coming from Eastern Ghouta, especially when most of these mortars have long targeted areas populated by Christians from churches which are members of WCC... Your statement clearly shows a biased position concerning what is happening in Syria in general, and in Damascus in particular.”

Prospects for freedom of religion

In general, in a situation of a sectarian conflict it is not always clear if infringements on the religious freedom of individuals and groups are solely or mainly motivated by the perpetrator’s hatred for a specific faith. In Syria, ethno-religious divisions have existed for centuries. Political factors might be as important as religious ones. More often than not, they in fact go together since religion and political affiliation to overlap.

There are two main groups who have violated religious freedom in Syria. The first group is the Assad government and its military allies such as Hezbollah, the Shia militia from Lebanon, and Shia volunteers from Iraq and Iran. They fight together against what they

see as a terrorist threat and Sunni Jihadist insurgency against the Syrian government and state. Some reports suggest that they have intentionally targeted Sunni areas.

The second main group is made up of non-state actors who have de facto established state-like control over certain areas. They break down into two sub-groups.

One includes Sunni jihadist groups among the rebel militias, such as Daesh or Al-Nusra Front. The militias of the so-called moderate opposition are in many cases also driven by Sunni ideology and pursue a religious vision for the country's future – usually less extremist than that of Daesh or Al-Nusra. Often, they tactically cooperate with jihadist groups, even when it has meant they are tacitly supporting acts of genocide being committed against religious minorities.²⁹ Daesh and Al-Nusra have committed grave acts against the religious freedom of Christians, Druze, and Sunnis in the areas they control. They have also attacked Shias and Alawites in terrorist attacks. The successful struggle to push back Daesh and other extremists across many parts of Syria has brought with it an end to the egregious violations of religious freedoms by hyper-extremist groups who can only be described as having committed a genocide against minority faith communities.

The other sub-group is mainly Kurdish militias in northern Syria. They control areas including the Khabur River region in northern Syria that has numerous well-established Christian settlements.

With the conflict now in its eighth year and no political solution in sight, the ongoing humanitarian crisis and the situation of religious freedom will not improve any time soon. Given the atrocities committed by all sides, it may prove difficult to bring the groups together again to live side by side once the fighting has stopped.

In June 2018, World Watch Monitor published an article on Syrian Armenians titled “70,000 Syrian Armenians have fled during the war, and few will return”, which reflects a reality faced by many religious minorities who used to live in the country.³⁰

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RELIGION



- Chinese Folk Religionists: 42,6%
- Buddhists: 26,6%
- Daoists: 12,7%
- New Religionists: 6,8%
- Christians: 6,1%
- Agnostics: 4,3%
- Others: 0,9%



AREA	POPULATION
36.000km ²	23.396.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Although the Republic of China, to give Taiwan's official name, is only separated from the People's Republic of China by the narrow Taiwan Strait, it is certainly far from the mainland in terms of respect for freedom of religion. Thanks to the democratisation of its government institutions and political life, which began under President Lee Teng-hui, a Presbyterian Christian¹ (in power from 1988 to 2000), Taiwan now enjoys genuine freedom of religion. Both the constitution and Taiwanese law guarantee the 23 million Taiwanese full freedom of religion and this is generally upheld by the authorities.² No religious tensions have been reported, either involving religious organisations or groups.

Taiwan is now experiencing a large influx of visitors from the People's Republic of China, who often have an opportunity to see for themselves how a Chinese country can experience actual religious freedom. This point can be illustrated by the experience of the Falun Gong movement in Taiwan. A form of qigong drawing on Buddhist tradition, Falun Gong became popular in China in the 1990s, with tens of thousands of followers. In 1999, frightened by the movement's success, Chinese authorities decided to crack down: Falun Gong was banned and thousands of its followers imprisoned, tortured and executed. By contrast, in Taiwan, where the movement continues to be active, the Falun Gong Society of Taiwan boasts 1 million members in more than 1,000 chapters. Although these figures should be treated with caution, the various efforts by Taiwanese members of Falun Gong to inform Chinese tourists visiting the island about their movement and the repression it has endured in mainland China, testify to the high degree of freedom of religion in Taiwan.³

From a legislative point of view, one area that deserves noting is the situation of domestic workers under Taiwan's labour laws. There are about 231,000 workers,⁴ coming mostly from the Philippines or Indonesia. Their work contracts usually do not include a weekly day of rest – limiting their ability to visit a place of worship to take part in corporate religious acts.⁵ It seems that, at the moment, the Taiwanese authorities have no plans to amend this legislation.

This consideration aside, religious freedom is enshrined in the constitution, which upholds freedom of worship and equal treatment of all religions. All religious activities

are considered legal as long as they do not interfere with fundamental freedoms and do not jeopardise public welfare and the social order.

In Taiwan, religions are acknowledged in everyday life and the country is home to many new religious movements that flourish and develop, often out of Buddhism, Taoism, or Confucianism, such as Yiguandao which grew out of the latter.

Another significant movement that shows the flourishing of religious organisations in Taiwan is Tzu Chi. Founded in 1966, the movement was born following the meeting of a Buddhist nun with three Catholic sisters from the Ursuline order. The Buddhist nun, Cheng Yen, went on to found Tzu Chi which carries out extensive social outreach and charity work. The movement now runs several monasteries, two universities, two television channels, vegetarian restaurants, various training centres and six hospitals. It is established in no less than 96 countries,⁶ and has 10,000 employees and 2 million volunteers.

Incidents

No major incident has been reported in the past two years in relation to the exercise of religious freedom.

In July 2017, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a cabinet-level executive agency, announced plans to limit the use of incense in the temples in large cities.⁷ The EPA explained that its decision was aimed at reducing air pollution caused by burning incense. Peaceful demonstrations took place in front of the Presidential Office Building in Taipei, with members of religious communities claiming that the smoke of incense was nothing compared to the pollution caused by industrial activity and transportation. In response, the Executive Yuan (Taiwan's cabinet) released pictures of President Tsai Ing-wen and then Prime Minister Lin Chuan holding incense sticks whilst praying in a temple, to show that the controversy was "a misunderstanding" and that the "EPA never wants to ban any practice of religion." Nevertheless, the agency insisted that the measure was needed to continue the efforts at improving the air quality of Taiwan's cities.⁸

The possible legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan has been a sensitive issue. The Alliance of Religious Groups for the Protection of the Family, a body set up in 2013 by the Catholic Church and some Buddhist groups, particularly opposes the lexical changes in the draft bill, such as the proposal to replace the words "husband and wife" in existing legislation with "spouses" or "companions". President Tsai Ing-wen, who during her presidential campaign openly supported "a plurality of types of family", chose to delay the bill, stating that, on this issue, a national consensus should be found first.⁹ However, no violation of the rights of religious groups has been recorded in connection with this issue.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Over the coming years, one can expect that the ongoing democratisation of national institutions and political life, which has taken root in the country, will prevent any curbs

to the exercise of freedom of religion. Religions have a significant presence in the life of the island.

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TAJIKISTAN

RELIGION



- Muslims: 97,3%
- Agnostics: 1,4%
- Others: 1,3%



AREA	POPULATION
143.100km ²	8.669.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Tajik constitution, approved in 1994 and amended in 2003, recognises the right to freedom of conscience. Article 26 states: “Everyone has the right to independently determine his (her) relationship toward religion, to profess any religion individually or together with others.”¹ However, the law on religion, which came into force in 2009, has taken steps against religious freedom, for example by making registration compulsory for religious groups and banning unregistered activity, private religious education and proselytising. The law also imposed strict limits on the number and size of mosques and gave the state power to appoint imams and define the content of Friday sermons. It also imposed strict state censorship on the content, publication and importation of religious materials. Other legal obstacles to the exercise of freedom of religion or belief were introduced later, with amendments to the Civil and Penal Codes, with the law on parental liability. This bans young people under 18 from taking part in religious activities, except for funerals. Another legal obstacle is the law on extremism, which has often been used to justify coercive actions against forms of Islam not sanctioned by the state.²

The government views with suspicion foreign influence, especially if it concerns Islam. By contrast, the authorities have sought to promote Tajik traditions. On 28th August 2017, amendments to the law on traditions, rites and celebrations came into effect, requiring Tajiks to wear national garments and follow the national culture. Many women have been stopped and their names registered – more than 8,000 in August 2017 alone – for wearing an Islamic veil. Other government steps to discourage women from wearing the veil include sending text messages to citizens on their private phones or shutting down shops that do not sell traditional Tajik garments.³ In August 2017 lawmakers approved a bill that tightens regulations regarding private ceremonies in an effort to curb ostentatious weddings. The new law bans people from wearing black at funerals and establishes rules to stop lamentations regarded as excessive.⁴

The minimum age for the annual hajj pilgrimage to Mecca was raised in 2017 from 35 to 40 years.⁵

In May 2016, restrictions on the number of terms President Rahmon is permitted to run were lifted and religious political parties were banned.⁶

Incidents

In late July 2017, Bakhrom Kholmatov, a pastor with the Korean Protestant Sonmin Sonbogym Church in Khujand, in the northern Sogd region, was sentenced to three years in prison on charges of inciting religious hatred by singing hymns deemed to be extremist.⁷ Kholmatov had been arrested on 10th April 2017 after a raid on his church. Law enforcement officers also swooped on other small Protestant congregations.

In Konibodom, a religious community was forcibly closed. Several of its members were pressured into renouncing their faith and, in some cases, they lost their jobs.

In Dushanbe, government officials closed two kindergartens, one because it had a book containing Christmas carols, and the other because two of its employees were Protestants.⁸

In the capital, the secret police on 11th June 2017 broke up a Sunday service of the Council of Baptist churches, seizing religious material.

On 29th October, the authorities raided the River of Life Protestant Church and fined one of the people present for having the printout of an article taken from a Russian website.

In April 2017 a Protestant was fined, his computer and religious material seized after he offered someone a Bible in Tajik.⁹

On 6th March 2016, police broke into a private home where Jehovah's Witnesses were meeting. They interrogated the 30 people present for more than six hours. Two months later, police stormed another Jehovah's Witnesses meeting, fining two of those present for illegal possession of religious material.¹⁰ On 13th October 2017, a Jehovah's witness called Daniil Islamov was sentenced to six months in jail by the military court in Qurghonteppa for refusing to do compulsory military service.¹¹

The government has used the spectre of extremism to control various Islamic religious practices, based on the premise that anything outside the bounds set by the state threatens the country's stability. In the past two years, mass arrests and trials have taken place involving dozens of people allegedly linked to extremist Islamic groups. Many religious activists who broke state rules, including some 20 imam-khatibs, were jailed after being accused of being Salafists, members of the Muslim Brotherhood or Hizb ut Tahrir.¹² There were many arrests and convictions, especially in Sogd and the capital, with average prison sentences of five years.

The 2016 convictions of members of the outlawed Islamic Renaissance Party (IRPT) of Tajikistan raised serious international concerns about the worsening domestic situation and fears the crackdown might help "to radicalise those pushed out of [the] public debate."¹³ The trials ended in two party members getting life in prison, 11 getting 14 to 28 years,¹⁴ two defence lawyers getting 20 years¹⁵ for defending party representatives, as well as frequent and brutal acts of intimidation against IRPT members and their families.

In an effort to limit all foreign influence, all imams trained abroad without the approval of Tajik authorities were replaced in November 2017 with more “amenable” clerics. Many students who attended Islamic schools abroad were forced to return¹⁶ even though the country’s last six madrassahs were closed in 2016.¹⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

Tajikistan, Central Asia’s poorest post-Soviet state, has been led by Emomali Rahmon since 1992 without any respect for civil liberties or religious and political freedom. Lately, repression of all forms of dissent has increased, with many acts of retaliation and intimidation against opponents and their families, drastically weakening freedom of expression. Although this is not directly related to a specific desire to curb freedom of religious belief, it is inevitable that the government’s growing intent to eliminate all forms of opposition will have negative repercussions on all expressions of religiosity outside the strict bounds set by the state.

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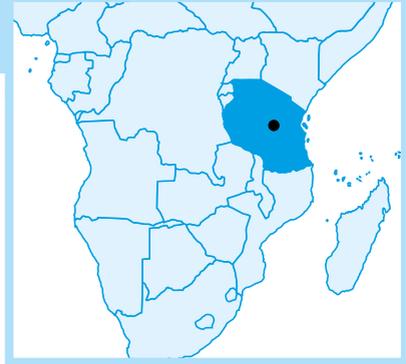
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TANZANIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 55,6%
- Muslims: 31,5%
- Ethnoreligionists: 11,2%
- Others: 1,7%



AREA	POPULATION
947.303km ²	55.155.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Amendments to the constitution of Tanzania are under consideration but had not passed into law at the time of writing. Therefore, the 1977 constitution (with its previous amendments) remains in force. Article 19 of that constitution states that “every person has the right to the freedom of thought or conscience, belief or faith, and choice in matters of religion, including the freedom to change his religion or faith”.¹

The new draft constitution contains further specifics about the extent of – and limitations on – the right to freedom of religion. In particular, the new article 41 contains detailed provisions including the following: (i) every person has the right to freedom of conscience and faith; (ii) every person has the right to celebrate and propagate freely their religion so long as it does not trespass the law of the country; (iii) the task of organising religious communities is outside the competence of the government; (iv) the protection of the right to freedom of worship shall be regulated by the law; (v) the state shall ban any misuse of the freedom of worship for purposes of disrupting the country’s peace, spreading hatred or stirring social confusion; (vi) faith and religion shall never be used to foster hostility or division among citizens.²

The constitution of Zanzibar – which since 1964 has been a part of the United Republic of Tanzania, but which is self-governing, with its own president and parliament – contains the same guarantees of religious freedom as the version of the constitution of Tanzania still in force.

All religious organisations are required to register with the Home Affairs Ministry on mainland Tanzania and with the General Register Office on Zanzibar. For registration, the names of at least 10 members are required, together with written statutes, CVs of the leaders and a letter of recommendation from the prefect of their district of origin. In addition, Muslim organisations are required to produce proof of authorisation from the National Muslim Council of Tanzania (Bakwata), or a similar authorisation from the local mufti if they are based on Zanzibar.

The Zanzibar government appoints a mufti, a professional jurist who interprets Shari'a (Islamic law), to oversee Muslim organisations. Some Muslims have argued that this practice represents excessive government interference.

The teaching of religion in state schools is permitted, but only as an extra-curricular subject. Lessons must be approved by the school management or teachers' associations and by the parents, and are offered free of charge by parents or other volunteers. Religious schools and universities are legal, and there are many of them, whether Christian (both Catholic and Protestant) or Islamic. Christian organisations are required to present the Interior Ministry with a letter of accreditation from the hierarchy of their own denomination.

The recognised national religious festivals include the Christian feasts of Good Friday, Easter Monday and Christmas Day, and the Muslim feasts of Maulid, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha.

Incidents

Tanzania has a long tradition of peaceful coexistence between different religious denominations, particularly between Christians and Muslims, and freedom of religion is generally respected. Religion is generally not seen as a factor of disunity, and recent conflicts and social tensions are typically seen as being caused by disputes among political parties.³

On 25th December 2017 Pastor Zachary Kakobe, who leads a Pentecostal church in the commercial capital Dar es Salaam, delivered a Christmas sermon in which he stated that Tanzania was "quietly turning into a one-party state by systematically banning political activity". Days later, the Home Affairs Ministry warned religious organisations which commented on political issues that they could have their licence revoked.⁴

A similar case took place in July 2016, when Bishop Gwajima of the Pentecostal Glory of Christ Tanzania Church in Dar es Salaam, was arrested and questioned by the Police after the cleric spoke from the pulpit criticising the country's ruling party. The police released the bishop after a few hours, but his church's license was suspended pending further investigation.

In September 2016, three suspects were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for an arson attack in 2015 on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the western Kagera Region.⁵

During the past few years, Christians in Tanzania – and, to a lesser extent, moderate Muslims – have been increasingly concerned about incidents of Islamist violence. In contrast with previous years, during the reporting period no serious incidents of attacks by Islamist radical elements against Christian institutions were reported.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Tanzania's long-standing tradition of respect for the right to religious freedom and of religious coexistence has continued, despite some attempts by extremist groups to spread a violent version of Islam in recent years. The activities of those groups have diminished

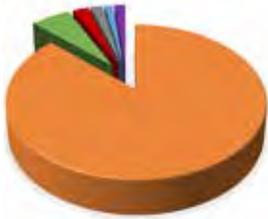
during the last two years. Other incidents, such as judicial actions taken against Pentecostal pastors, seem to have had political motives. Therefore, we can conclude that respect for the right to religious freedom has improved in Tanzania during the period under review and that the prospects are positive.

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THAILAND

RELIGION



● Buddhists: 87,1%
● Muslims: 5,9%
● Ethnoreligionists: 2,3%
● Agnostics: 1,8%
● Christians: 1,3%
● Others: 1,6%



THAILAND

AREA	POPULATION
513.120km ²	68.147.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

While political power has been in the hands of the military junta led by General Prayuth Chan-O-Cha since May 2014, the country has experienced a delicate period of transition. It is in this context that the ruling military drafted a new constitution, the twentieth in a century, which was approved by referendum on 7th August 2016.¹

King Bhumibol (Rama IX) passed away on 13th October 2016 after 70 years. His successor, Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, who has taken the name Rama X, has not yet announced the date of his coronation.

The new constitution was promulgated on 6th April 2017 by the new king, but not before he obtained several amendments to boost his powers.² Although the document is clearly aimed at ensuring the military can continue to dominate politics, it offers important guarantees for freedom of religion. In a country where Buddhism profoundly structures social life, article seven makes it clear that the king can only be a Buddhist.³ However, religious freedom is clearly defined in article 31: "A person shall enjoy full liberty to profess a religion, and shall enjoy the liberty to exercise or practise a form of worship in accordance with his or her religious principles, provided that it shall not be contrary to the duties of all Thai people: neither shall it endanger the safety of the state, nor shall it be contrary to public order or good morals."⁴

However, during the drafting process of the new constitution, debate focused again on the place of Buddhism and whether to include a constitutional clause that would make Buddhism "the national religion of the country". Already in 1997, in 2007, and in 2014, during the elaboration of previous constitutions, there had been talk of promoting Buddhism,⁵ but this time anxiety arose among religious minorities, particularly about article 67 of the new text.⁶ This article declares that the state should "support and protect Buddhism and other religions". The original constitutional draft stipulated that the state "shall establish measures and mechanisms to prevent the desecration of Buddhism in any form and encourage the participation of all Buddhists in the application of such measures and mechanisms".⁷ In the adopted text it is no longer a question of defending Buddhism against all "desecration", but only of preventing Buddhism from being "under-

mined”, giving the state the mission of supporting and protecting Buddhism, “which is the religion observed by the majority of Thai people for a long period of time”. In particular, the state must “support education and [the] dissemination of the dharmic principles of Theravada Buddhism”.⁸

Even in this softened form, article 67 has raised concerns, particularly among religious minorities; in particular because, contrary to most of the previous constitutions, it does not refer to the importance of “religious harmony”.

This concern has been most acute in the Muslim minority. Not surprisingly, in the referendum of 7th August 2016, the three provinces with a Muslim majority in the south of the country (Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat) saw the highest proportion of votes against the new constitution. An ethno-nationalist insurgency against the central state has been going on in those provinces for decades where the population is 80 percent Muslim and culturally Malay. The conflict, which has worsened since 2004, has killed about 7,000 people, both Buddhists and Muslims.

The ruling junta quickly heeded the concerns expressed about article 67 and, on 22nd August 2016, issued a decree to “complete” this article. The purpose of the decree was to “prevent acts that threaten Buddhism and other religions” (and a committee was set up to do this) and it reiterated the traditional call for “religious harmony”.⁹ Thai Muslims reacted with some scepticism, while acknowledging that the decree was a gesture of good will on the part of the military regime to “put things right”.

The constitution notwithstanding, the exercise of religious freedom in Thailand is real. The government recognises, through the Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Culture, five religious groups – Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians – and the religious organisations connected to these five groups can obtain certain benefits from the authorities such as tax exemptions, expedited visa applications and state subsidies. The state allocates US\$160 million each year to the country’s temples in four areas (building upkeep, religious education, promotion of religious activities and salaries of Buddhist temples’ superiors). The largest share of these grants (US\$148 million) goes to Buddhism through the National Buddhism Bureau, a body that is separate from the Religious Affairs Department.¹⁰

This said, belonging to a religious group that has not registered with the authorities does not seem to be an obstacle to getting benefits. The International Religious Freedom Report for 2016 published by the United States Department of State notes that Mormons are not officially recognised and yet this did not prevent them from obtaining 200 missionary visas to support their activities in the country.¹¹ Many Christian organisations also use Thailand as a base for their operations in South-East Asia since it is quite easy to obtain a tourist visa to enter the country and carry out missionary activities without complaints from the authorities.

Incidents

In this predominantly Buddhist country, headed by a military government since 2014, one of the most sensitive points of religious life concerns the relationship between political powers and Buddhist monks. Two events illustrate the complexity of this relationship.

On 29th December 2016, the National Legislative Assembly, a 250-member parliament wholly appointed by the junta, unanimously passed an amendment to the 1962 Monastic Law on how to appoint the Supreme Patriarch of Thai Buddhism.¹² The amendment strips the Sangha Supreme Council (the monastic community) of the power to appoint the patriarch. The new article stipulates that “the king appoints the supreme patriarch, and this choice is then countersigned by the prime minister”. (In practice, the king chooses the new supreme patriarch from a list of names provided by the prime minister). The measure was designed to ensure that the post of supreme patriarch did not go to a specific individual on the basis of the old method of appointment. The high-ranking monk in question, 91-year-old Somdet Chuang, is seen by the military and their conservative allies as too close to the Wat Phra Dhammakaya, a financially and politically influential temple which advocates a heterodox and materialistic version of Buddhism. On 7th February 2017, another monk, Somdet Phra Maha Munivong, who was 90 years old, was appointed by the king as the head of Thai Buddhism.¹³

A second event concerns the same temple, Wat Phra Dhammakaya. Its former superior, Abbot Dhammachayo, is suspected of financial malpractice and money laundering. In order to arrest him, the junta mobilised some 4,000 police agents and hundreds of soldiers for three weeks, from mid-February and 10th March 2017, to go through the immense Buddhist temple complex, which covers 320 hectares north of Bangkok. Dhammachayo has not been found. The junta stripped the main temple officials of their clerical functions.¹⁴ The military regime desires to place Dhammakaya Temple under their own control because the ruling generals are convinced that it has close ties with the political clan of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

The other major issue concerns the situation in the five provinces of southern Thailand, four of which are overwhelmingly Muslim and Malay. Here, the central government has been pitted against the local majority, which has demanded recognition of their distinctive character within the country. The fight is not strictly speaking religious in nature. The question is whether Bangkok will recognise the existence of a community that does not want to be assimilated into the dominant Thai and Buddhist culture. This minority claims the right to speak another language, a Malay dialect, to have another religion, Islam, and to be rooted in a different culture, one of Malay origin.

Bangkok's security-focused response has shown its limits. A force of 60,000 soldiers and police has not been sufficient to control a population of about two million people, nor to eradicate violent militants. In retaliating after the murders of Thai teachers and Buddhist monks, government forces have used violence which they have justified in the name of a state of emergency in three provinces. According to the NGO Deep South Watch,¹⁵ 14 people died and 43 were wounded in February 2018 alone. In 2016, the death toll was

307 and with 628 wounded. Three quarters of these are civilians, 60 percent of them Muslims and 35 percent Buddhists.¹⁶

Since violence first broke out in 2004, no negotiated solution has seemed to be in sight. With each bout of violence in the south of the country, petitions circulate around the kingdom, signed by lay people who are roused by the sermons of monks warning of the “future eradication” of Buddhism in the south. In November 2015, Phra Apichat Promjan, a Buddhist monk from Bangkok, wrote on Facebook: “if a Buddhist monk dies” from Muslim violence “a mosque should be burned, starting from the northern part of Thailand southwards”.¹⁷ The monk has since been defrocked.

Other sensitive issues include the fate of Pakistanis who found refuge in the country and Chinese nationals who are members of Falun Gong. Taking advantage of the relatively easy access to Thailand, thousands of Pakistani Christians have claimed refugee status in the country. However, the UNCHR’s delays in processing their asylum applications has put them in an untenable situation. Up to 7,000 refugees live in very precarious conditions. On 27th May 2017, a 35-year-old Pakistani Christian man died of a heart attack at the Immigration Detention Centre in Bangkok. According to other detainees, he had been left unattended for several hours while repeatedly complaining about chest pain.¹⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

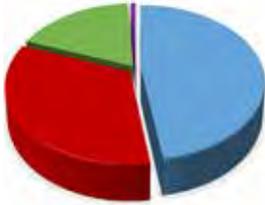
The military nature of the ruling regime has not fundamentally challenged the status of freedom of religion in Thailand. However, the crackdown by the junta against the Sangha Supreme Council shows how far the dividing line between temporal and spiritual power has become blurred.¹⁹ In the long run, this subordination of Buddhism to the government – a government installed by a coup d’état – could seriously damage the credibility of Thai Buddhism.

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RELIGION



- Christians: 47,7%
- Ethnoreligionists: 33,2%
- Muslims: 18,3%
- Others: 0,8%



AREA
56.785km²

POPULATION²
7.497.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Republic of Togo's constitution assures everyone of equality before the law regardless of religion.¹ It enshrines freedom of religion and this principle is generally respected by the authorities. It also prohibits the formation of political parties based on a specific religious identity.²

As in many other countries in West Africa, the north of the country is mostly Muslim whilst the south is predominantly Christian. Catholicism, Islam and Protestantism are "official" religions; other denominations are required to register with the authorities.³ Registration is compulsory for all religious communities if they want to enjoy the same benefits as the "official" faiths, such as duty-free imports.⁴ To register, a religious association must submit its statutes, together with an explanation of its teachings, the names and addresses of its spiritual leaders, the religious and general qualifications of its clergy, a map with the location of its places of worship, and an overview of the community's financial situation. Registration remains provisional until the authorities have satisfied themselves that the group meets the standards of ethics and public order. This process can take several years to complete.⁵

Public celebrations that might cause a disturbance or constitute a nuisance – e.g. loud festivities at night – require special permission by the Directorate of Religious Affairs.⁶ Formal religious instruction is not offered in state schools. However, there are many Catholic, Protestant and Islamic schools for which the government provides additional teaching staff.⁷

Incidents

During the reporting period, there were no institutional changes affecting religious freedom or reports of significant incidents that restricted freedom of religion in Togo. Relations between the government and religious groups are generally good, e.g. on 28th January 2016, Pope Francis welcomed the president of the Republic of Togo, Faure Essozimina Gnassingbé, and spoke with him about relations between the Holy See and

Togo.⁸ The topics discussed included the contribution of the Catholic Church to the country's development, particularly in education.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Togo is one of 34 countries that have joined a coalition put together by Saudi Arabia to combat Islamist terrorism. The practical impact of this remains to be seen.⁹ However, many analysts view the fact that Togo is one of just four countries in this coalition with a non-Muslim majority population as a sign of just how seriously the threat of jihadist terrorism is now being taken in West Africa.¹⁰

At the same time, Togo's president, who is now in his third term, is coming under increasing pressure. The political opposition speaks of a strictly authoritarian state,¹¹ and according to a report in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on 23rd September 2017, hundreds of thousands of Togolese protested for a week against the president, calling for his resignation.¹² However, relations between religions in Togo are likely to remain peaceful and not suffer in the event of a change of government. This, however, depends on religious communities not being politically exploited by one side or the other.

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TONGA

RELIGION



- Christian: 95,8%
- Bahá'ís: 3,6%
- Others: 0,44%



AREA
747km²

POPULATION
107.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Tonga is an archipelago in Oceania about two-thirds of the way from Hawaii to New Zealand.

Under the constitution, all persons are “free to practise their religion and to worship God as they may deem fit in accordance with the dictates of their own worship consciences and to assemble for religious service in such places as they may appoint.”¹ The constitution also specifies, however, that it is unlawful to use this freedom “to commit evil and licentious acts or, under the name of worship, to do what is contrary to the law and peace of the land”. The constitution provides that “the Sabbath shall be kept holy in Tonga” and that no business transactions are permitted, except those allowed by the law. Any legal agreements made on the Sabbath are void in law.

The country is overwhelmingly Christian. The largest churches are the Free Wesleyan Church (37.3 percent), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (16.8 percent), the Free Church of Tonga (11.4 percent), and the Roman Catholic Church (15.6 percent)². There are a number of smaller Christian communities including the Church of Tonga (7.2 percent), the Tokaikolo Christian Church (2.6 percent), the Assembly of God (2.3 percent), and the Seventh Day Adventists (2.2 percent). There are also other religions, including Muslims, Hindus and Baha'is.

There is no requirement for religious groups to register with the state. However, registration is needed to conduct legally binding marriages and to obtain other benefits, such as tax exemptions.

Religious communities are permitted to run education centres and are allowed to offer religious education once a week for an hour.³ Students are not required to attend religious courses about a religion other than their own; otherwise such education is compulsory.

The constitutional provisions about religious freedom are generally respected by the government in Tonga. Missionaries are allowed to enter the country and proselytise. In May 2016, however, Imam Ilyas, a Muslim religious leader, reported concerns that the government had failed to approve the Muslim community's application for registration.⁴

The state-owned Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC) has guidelines which require those who give sermons on Tonga TV and Radio Tonga preach mainstream Christianity. There are no reports of requests to broadcast being denied by the TBC.

Incidents

On 3rd July 2016, steps were taken to stop bakeries opening on a Sunday to comply with the constitutional provisions about the Sabbath.⁵ The application of these provisions had been relaxed in the 1980s, following a cyclone, and not enforced since then. Some Tongans publicly expressed their disagreement with the enforcement of the constitution, though their objections seem to arise from business considerations rather than religious principle.⁶ Hotels and restaurants still operate on Sundays to serve tourists. In Tonga, the Seventh Day Adventists observe the Sabbath on Sunday, even though elsewhere they observe it from Friday evening to Saturday evening. Nothing indicates that they believe this adjustment violates their religious freedom. The reason for this is that, although the island is geographically in the Western Hemisphere, it observes eastern time, so when it is still Saturday in the former, it is already Sunday in the latter.⁷

In February 2017 a teenage Tongan Islamic convert appeared in an Australian court charged with planning a terrorist attack.⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

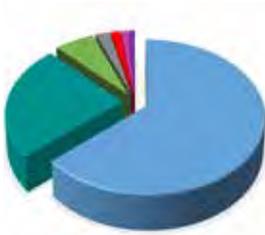
Religious freedom is generally protected by the state. There are no indications that the current situation will change within the foreseeable future.

Endnotes

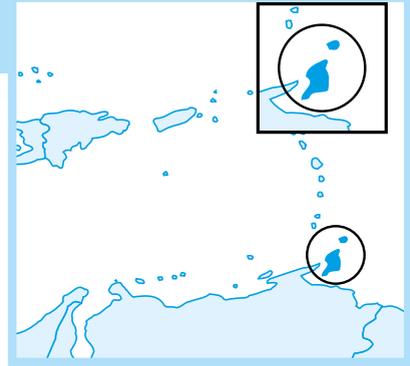
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TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

RELIGION



- Christians: 63,4%
- Hindus: 24,3%
- Muslims: 6,4%
- Agnostics: 2,3%
- Spiritists: 1,4%
- Bahais: 1,2%
- Others: 1%



AREA
5.127km²

POPULATION
1.365.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In its preamble, the constitution¹ states that Trinidad and Tobago is founded on principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God, the dignity of the human person and an individual's inherent rights. It stresses that these rights have been endowed by the creator.

Article four of the constitution also recognises the right to freedom, equality before the law, the protection of the law, the right of parents to choose their children's education, freedom of conscience and worship, freedom of thought and expression, freedom of association and the prohibition of discrimination based on race, origin, colour, religion or sex.

Article 29 of the Education Act² states that no one can be refused admission to a state school on religious grounds. Religious education is allowed in state schools. Should parents request religious instruction for their children, space in the school timetable should be provided for a faith group willing to provide it. Participation is strictly voluntary.

Muslim marriage and divorce are regulated by law.³

Judicial oaths can be taken on the New Testament by Christians, and the Old Testament by Jews. For those who do not belong to these religions, the oath can be administered in other ways.⁴

The law prohibits acts that promote hostility against any group on religious grounds.⁵

Religious groups must be registered with the government and need to demonstrate that they are active. Such groups must register as charitable organisations in order to obtain tax exemption status and be authorised to register civil marriages. Missionaries belonging to registered religious groups are allowed into the country.⁶

The government funds activities carried out by the Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO), which represents most religious groups. Nondenominational state schools and religiously affiliated state schools receive government grants.⁷

Incidents

In 2017, two Christian places of worship, including a Catholic church, were burgled in Sangre Grande.⁸

In February 2018 Prime Minister Keith Rowley said that those accused of criminal actions should not allege that they are being religiously discriminated against by the authorities, stressing that “nobody in this country is above the law.” He noted that “If the security services have information” about “criminal intent or [. . .] criminal conduct,” they must “protect the rest of the country regardless” of religion.⁹

Police were accused of provoking members of the Muslim community at a 11th March 2018 rally held at a stadium in Marabella. Muslims had gathered to protest against the implications of a proposed anti-terrorism bill. Police agents were accused of carrying out excessive vehicle searches as well as conducting a body search of a security guard. The plain clothes officers conducting the search did not show any ID. At the protest, proposed changes to the current anti-terrorism law were criticised on the grounds that they would affect constitutional rights. Fiaz Ali, a speaker at the event, made accusations of intent to incite Islamophobia exists.¹⁰

Prospects for freedom of religion

In common with 2014-16, the period under review saw no signs of intolerance to suggest that religious freedom is in decline.

Endnotes

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TUNISIA

RELIGION



- Muslims: 99,5%
- Others: 0,5%



AREA	POPULATION
163.610km ²	11.375.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The post-revolutionary constitution¹ promulgated in January 2014 stresses the Tunisian people's commitment "to the teachings of Islam" and the protection of the country's "cultural heritage". According to Article 1, "Tunisia is a free, independent and sovereign state; its religion is Islam, its language is Arabic, and its system is republican." Article 2 states, however: "Tunisia is a civil state based on citizenship, the will of the people and the supremacy of the law."

Article 6 reads as follows: "The state is the guardian of religion. It guarantees freedom of conscience and belief, the free exercise of religious practices and the neutrality of mosques... The state undertakes to disseminate the values of moderation and tolerance and the protection of the sacred, and the prohibition of all violations thereof. It undertakes equally to prohibit and fight against calls for Takfir and the incitement of violence and hatred."² Critics see this article as contradictory.³ Although the current government has emphasised the importance of religious freedom, that same liberty is – according to critics – undermined by the constitution, which they see as legitimising restrictions. According to Fadhel Achour, secretary general of the Union of Imams, secularism in Tunisia is impossible because Tunisia is historically "a Muslim Nation".⁴

The president must be Muslim. The constitution, however, guarantees freedom of belief and conscience. Attempts by Islamists in the Constitutional Assembly to criminalise apostasy have failed. Conversion from Islam to another religion is not illegal under the constitution.

Shari'a law is not mentioned as a source of legislation but it is partly incorporated in the laws that regulate personal status (marriage and inheritance).

Under an agreement between the Holy See and Tunisia, dating from 1964, the Catholic Church is officially recognised and allowed to operate churches and social institutions. A local Catholic source who wished to remain anonymous, said: "[The agreement] gives us legal certainty, but also brings restrictions. According to this *modus vivendi*, we are not allowed to make public expressions of the Catholic faith such as processions or the like. On the whole, this agreement prohibits any form of proselytising."⁵

The vast majority of Tunisian citizens are Sunni Muslims but a number have converted to Christianity, with some sources citing figures as high as 12,000. According to local Catholic sources, around 25,000 foreign Christians live in Tunisia. Others give a much lower figure. The majority of foreign Christians are Catholic, with local sources suggesting there may be as many as 20,000.⁶ In addition, there are Orthodox and Protestant communities. Most Christians from abroad work or study in Tunisia or are migrants, many of them sub-Saharan Africans.

Many Christians worked as clerks in the African Development Bank⁷ and their numbers in parishes dwindled after the ADB left Tunisia; they had temporarily settled in Tunisia after being forced to leave the Ivory Coast in 2003 for reasons of safety. The bank employed several hundred Christians and their families have now returned to the Ivory Coast.

There is an ancient Jewish community of around 1,500 people living in Tunisia.⁸ Most Jews left Tunisia after the establishment of the State of Israel. Today's Tunisian Jews are mainly in Tunis and on the island of Djerba. The Chief Rabbi is paid by the Tunisian government. Although Jewish communities are still exposed to threats, they are given relative freedom and close protection.⁹

Incidents

There is increasing social and official pressure in favour of a more conservative Islam, especially in remote small cities and rural areas. Last Ramadan (summer 2017), five Tunisians were arrested on charges of "public indecency" for not respecting Ramadan in public; each was sentenced to one month in prison, four for eating in public and the fifth for smoking.¹⁰ This sparked protests by civil society groups asking for the right not to fast during Ramadan.¹¹

There were no terrorist attacks in Tunisia since 2015. The historic Christian cemetery of Sfax was, however, desecrated in February 2017.¹²

More recently, in January 2018, the El Ghriba synagogue on the island of Djerba was firebombed.¹³ Unlike the terror attack by Al-Qaeda in 2002, this one, which only caused minor damage and no injuries, appears to be the result of social unrest. Two Molotov cocktails were thrown at the entrance of Jewish schools.¹⁴

Although there was no repeat of the large-scale terrorist attacks seen in the previous reporting period, concerns remained especially concerning Al-Qaeda and other extremists returning to the country following the defeat of Daesh (ISIS) in many parts of Syria and Iraq. The Tunisia military is very concerned about the possibility of Al-Qaeda trying to regroup in the country.¹⁵

Prospects for freedom of religion

Moves towards changing inheritance law in Tunisia to achieve gender equality are among a number of indications suggesting that the government in Tunisia may be willing to

take steps to empower minority groups including non-Muslims. President Béji Caïd Essebsi appointed a commission to look into changes to a 1973 decree that prohibits Tunisian Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men. For the President, the latter is “an obstacle to the freedom of choice of the spouse”.¹⁶ Following heated debates, the decree was repealed.

These issues have ignited a broad and heated debate not only in Tunisia, but also around the Arab and Muslim World. There was whole-hearted condemnation from Egypt’s Al-Azhar, a Sunni institution, which declared such decisions as “counter to Islamic teachings”.¹⁷

Local Catholics consider the country’s 2014 constitution as progress. “It not only guarantees freedom of worship but also real freedom of conscience,” a Catholic priest told ACN.¹⁸ He added: “This includes religious conversions, such as those from Islam to Christianity, which would be inconceivable in many Islamic countries.”

He went on: “We will have to see how things develop. Theory is one thing, practice is another. A Muslim who shows an interest in Christianity might be placed under strong social pressure.”¹⁹ In fact, according to local sources, some Muslim converts to Christianity have been harassed or ostracised by their own families.

As social and economic discontent grows, unrest may lead to massive street protests and a resurgence in recruitment by jihadist groups. This, in turn, may lead to the targeting of non-Muslim communities.

Endnotes

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TURKEY

RELIGION



- Muslims: 98,3%
- Agnostics: 1,1%
- Others: 0,6%



AREA	POPULATION ³
769.562km ²	79.622.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Turkish constitution¹ defines the country as a secular state. It guarantees freedom of conscience, religious belief, conviction, expression and worship. Article 24 prohibits discrimination on religious grounds and exploitation or abuse of “religious feelings, or things held sacred by religion.”

The Turkish state coordinates and governs religious matters through the Directorate (or Presidency) of the Religious Affairs (Diyanet), established in 1924 under article 136 of the constitution as a successor to the highest religious authority (Shayk al-Islam) after the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate. Operating under the Prime Minister’s office, the Directorate promotes the teaching and practices of Sunni Islam. For 2018, the Turkish government allocated US\$2 billion from the state budget to the directorate , awarding it more money than 12 other ministries and most state institutions.²

National identity cards contain a space for religious identification, although the constitution stipulates that no one can be compelled to reveal his or her religious belief.³

Religious groups are not required to register with the authorities but the places of worship of unregistered groups are not recognised by the state.⁴

Under the constitution, Sunni Islamic religious instruction is mandatory in state-maintained primary and secondary schools. Only students self-identified as “Christian” or “Jewish” on their national identity cards may apply for an exemption from these classes. The government continues to refuse to exempt 'Alevi or other children from compulsory Sunni Islamic instruction.⁵

The government interprets restrictively the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which refers to “non-Muslim minorities”, as granting special legal minority status exclusively to three recognised groups: Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Christians, Greek Orthodox Christians and Jews. Despite this special status, they, like other minority groups such as Catholics, Syrians, Protestants, 'Alevi, etc.), have no legal identity: they cannot buy or own properties or seek legal redress. Currently these groups are able to hold on to their property through separate foundations.⁶

There are no reliable data about the religious minority groups.⁷

In its International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor of the US Department of State paints a more detailed image of the little-known, non-Muslim presence in Turkey. The report states that minority groups give figures showing that there are 90,000 Armenian Apostolic Christians (of which about 60,000 are Turkish citizens and the rest illegal immigrants from Armenia), 25,000 Roman Catholics (including many recent immigrants from Africa and the Philippines), 25,000 Syrian Orthodox, 15,000 Russian Orthodox, 7,000 Protestants, 22,000 Yezidis (most of whom came as refugees in 2014), 17,000 Jews, 10,000 Bahais, 5,000 Jehovah's Witnesses.⁸ The report states: "Estimates of the number of atheists vary, but most recent published surveys suggest approximately 2 percent of the population is atheist."⁹

Waves of migrants fleeing the Syrian civil war have affected Turkey's religious demography. Since 2014 thousands of Arabic-speaking Catholic (mainly Chaldeans, Syrians) and Orthodox Christians have entered the country. The total number of refugees entering Turkey is estimated at about 3.5 million as of the first quarter of 2018.¹⁰ Settled in 81 Turkish cities, these refugees must remain where they registered in order to receive government financial aid. They are permitted to work, but only where they registered. The exact number of the non-Muslim refugees in cities is unknown. Christian refugees struggle to maintain their faith as most churches are in Istanbul and in a few other large cities. The small minority of Arabic-speaking Christian ministers are obliged to travel from city to city, renting (sometimes at very high prices) spaces to celebrate multiple baptisms, confirmations and weddings, often on the same day.

The state only allows the training of Sunni clerics while restricting it for other religious groups. The lack of Christian seminaries in Turkey prevents the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox Patriarchates from educating the next generation of clerics.

The Greek Orthodox Theological Seminary was closed in 1971. The Turkish government claims that the reason of this is the failure of the Greek government to guarantee reciprocal the religious freedom of its Turkish Muslim minority.¹¹

Turkey's Jewish community is able to practise its religion freely. Synagogues receive ongoing security protection from the government. Anti-Semitism, especially in print and social media, remains an issue in Turkey. However, Turkey is the only majority Muslim country that actively contributes to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.¹²

Incidents

The Armenian Orthodox Community is the largest Christian group of Turkey. With 60,000 members, this Church is trying to resolve internal leadership problems which in turn have consequences for the legal recognition of the Church in Turkey.¹³ The titular Patriarch of the Church, Mesrob II Mutafyan, fell ill in 2008 and remains in a 'vegetative state' in a hospital in Istanbul. The Ecclesial Assembly elected Archbishop Bekçiyen, then Primate of Armenians in Germany, as locum tenens of the Patriarchate on 15th March 2017, directing him to organise the elections. However, the Turkish Government refuses to recognise

the patriarchal elections, as the current patriarch is alive. Archbishop Bekçiyen left the country on 13th February 2018.¹⁴

Andrew Brunson, the pastor of the İzmir Resurrection Church who has lived in Turkey for more than two decades, has been held since 7th October 2016 on charges of working with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which is considered a terrorist organisation by NATO, the US and the UE. Brunson's trial is one of several legal cases straining US-Turkish relations.¹⁵ According to Brunson's lawyer, Ismail Cem Halavurt, the clergyman from North Carolina was arrested because of his religious beliefs. "There is evidence that shows Brunson was arrested due to his faith," Halavurt told a news agency just before the trial began in April 2018. Instead, Brunson's religious role was "classified as aiding terror organisations".¹⁶ Brunson was charged with helping an armed terrorist organisation and "obtaining confidential government information for political and military espionage". The trial continues.¹⁷ On 8th February 2018 the European Parliament urged Turkey to release Pastor Brunson.¹⁸

During the Christmas season there was an increase in hate speech directed toward certain Protestant Churches in Turkey, with media reporting about particular places of worship and therefore scaring the faithful who planned to attend the ceremonies.¹⁹

Between November and December 2017, windows were broken and graffiti in the Malatya Kurtulus Church, the Balikesir Church and the Istanbul Kadikoy International Church

In March 2017, death threats were sent to Radio Shema, the Christian broadcasters in Ankara. Since then, the station and its director have received greater protection from the police.

Prospects for freedom of religion

In April 2018, the Turkish government called a snap election for 24th June 2018. This election will take place under a state of emergency in place since an attempted coup d'état in July 2016. During this time, Turkey has seen mass arrests, arbitrary sacking and other abuses. Some 160,000 people have been detained and a similar number of civil servants dismissed since the failed putsch. Opposition media outlets have been shut down and many journalists have been imprisoned. This environment of intolerance, fear and instability affects Turkey's religious minorities. Indeed, religious minorities suffer particularly; Christian groups, for example, are shrinking and Christianity is on the verge of disappearing.

The constitution of 1981 establishes secularism as a central principle defining the relationship between the Turkish state and Islam, as well as other religions. Although theoretically it provides protection, "Turkish-style secularism" has been very coercive vis-à-vis non-Muslims. Turkey's ruling (Islamist) Justice and Development Party wants to debate the concept of Turkish-style secularism in order to "free" Islam from Kemalism (the secularist ideas and principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder and first president of the Turkish Republic). Paradoxically, minorities might benefit from this flexibility in terms of greater juridical recognition and protection for their assets. However, non-Muslims fear this could only be a display intended for the international community.

It is hard to deny that Turkey is moving towards autocracy, and this may well result in a roll back of the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Turkish society has been increasingly subject to Islamic influences, some of which are self-evidently intolerant of non-Muslims. Churches and synagogues are regularly threatened; non-Muslims find it increasingly difficult to express their faith in public.

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TURKMENISTAN

RELIGION



- Muslims: 95,5%
- Agnostics: 2,5%
- Christians: 1,3%
- Others: 0,7%



AREA	POPULATION
488.100km ²	5.439.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 12 of the constitution of Turkmenistan guarantees its citizens freedom of religion and worship and equality before the law. At the same time, it upholds the right of each person to profess any religion, individually or with others, to express and spread beliefs related to their views about religion and to participate in religious rituals and practices.¹

Despite this, other legal provisions criminalise free religious activity, including, among others, articles 76 and 77 of the Administrative Code,² which is used to punish any activity by unregistered religious organisations with fines ranging from 100 to 1,000 manats (from €25 to €250, US\$ 28 to \$280);³ article 177, paragraph two of the Criminal Code, which punishes inciting social, national or religious hatred; article 219, paragraph one, of the same code, which punishes failure to perform military service with a maximum jail sentence of two years.⁴

On 12th April 2016 a new law on religion came into force. Announced by President Berdimukhamedov in parliament on 12th January 2016 and seen as necessary to counter the worldwide increase in alleged terrorism and religious extremism, the new legislation was adopted without much fanfare on 26th March 2016.⁵ The main change is the elimination of the category “religious groups” – i.e. movements composed of at least five members – replaced only by the category “religious organisations”, which require at least 50 adult members – whose personal data and contact information must be specified in detail – in order for them to apply for state recognition.⁶ This means that it will be much harder for some religious groups to reach the minimum number of members to register.

Grounds for the suspension or dissolution of a religious organisation include activities that violate the constitution, “the lawful interests of the country’s citizens or [. . .] their ‘health and morale’.”⁷

The new law establishes that the leaders of registered religious organisations must be Turkmen citizens who have received “appropriate religious education”.⁸ Any tie with foreign religious organisations, including participation in pilgrimages abroad, requires the authorisation of the Commission for Work on Religious Organisations.⁹

The law states that officials of the Ministry of Justice can participate in any religious event held by a registered religious organisation and interrogate religious leaders on every aspect of their activities.¹⁰

According to the new law, local governments have the right to monitor and analyse the religious situation within their jurisdiction and submit proposals to modernise legislation on religious freedom.¹¹

The new law allows registered religious organisations to set up religious schools to train clergy and other religious personnel after obtaining a special licence.¹² Children may receive religious education for up to four hours per week, subject to parental approval.¹³

State approval is needed to publish and distribute religious material,¹⁴ a rigid and highly restrictive process that in recent years has made it harder for believers to have access to religious literature.

Although the previous religious law referred to no well-defined alternative to military service, the new law states that no one has the right to refuse – on religious grounds – to fulfil the duties established by the constitution and the law. Thus, no one can exercise the right to conscientious objection to avoid military service.¹⁵

Police, secret services and local authorities control the various religious communities and frequently carry out raids against both registered and non-registered Churches – many of which end in threats, beatings, arrests, fines and confiscation of religious material.¹⁶

The most active individuals in the various religious communities are often closely monitored by the secret and regular police and other state agencies. Religious leaders must regularly report on the activities of their communities and anything they consider “serious”.¹⁷

It is almost impossible for the various congregations to receive visits from foreign confreres. Only registered religious communities have the right to ask permission to invite foreigners for religious purposes, and such requests are rarely accepted.¹⁸

Religious activity by unregistered religious groups is illegal. For many communities, registration has always been very difficult; their requests have been rejected on several grounds, from grammatical errors in the application form to the blindness of their leader.¹⁹ Under new legislation, applying has become more difficult. Even religious movements that had obtained state recognition in the past have to register again – with the outcome uncertain. For now, the number of religious organisations that have managed to register under the new rules is still unknown. Before the new law came into effect, the government formally recognised 130 entities: 106 Muslim, 13 Orthodox Russian and 11 other, including Catholics, Baha’is and Protestants.²⁰ The Catholic Church, formally reconstituted in 1997 with the *Missio sui iuris* established by Pope Saint John Paul II, was recognised in 2010 by the Turkmen government and has about 200 members.²¹

Another major difficulty for religious communities is finding locations or places to hold their religious meetings and celebrations since the government and state enterprises continue to interfere in the purchase or long-term rental of land and buildings. Even

renting private spaces for special events or liturgical celebrations is made difficult by owners' concern that they might incur the government's displeasure.²²

Incidents

Turkmenistan has one of the most repressive and restrictive governments in the world, with pervasive controls over all aspects of public life, a high level of corruption,²³ and great intolerance towards any form of dissent. Independent critics and the few activists who promote human rights face the constant threat of government reprisals.²⁴

As in the case of other fundamental rights, freedom of religion and belief is also seriously restricted in Turkmenistan.²⁵ Various reports from international organisations have highlighted the seriousness of the situation. In 2017, the US State Department again designated Turkmenistan as a Country of Particular Concern for its systematic and persistent violation of religious freedom, a status it has had since 2014.²⁶ In its 2017 World Watch List, Open Doors ranked Turkmenistan 19th of the top 50 countries in the world where it is more difficult to live as a Christian.²⁷

Many churches and mosques have been demolished in recent years. In March 2016, the Sunni Aksa Mosque in Ashgabat was torn down. Although it was built in the early 1990s, it lacked the necessary building permits, according to local authorities.²⁸

Places of worship confiscated under Soviet rule have not been returned. The Armenian Apostolic Church is still waiting for the return of its chapel in Turkmenbashi, despite the promise to return it made in 2012 by President Berdimuhamedov. Although the Russian Orthodox Church has been authorised to maintain and occasionally build new churches over the past two decades, it has not yet been able to regain possession of all the properties seized during the Soviet period.²⁹

Even for registered Christian groups, ordinary life is not easy. On several occasions, government officials have continued to ask them to obtain approval for routine religious activities, such as weekly liturgies, or social and charitable activities, including children's summer camps.³⁰

In February 2016, the secret police summoned the pastor the Baptist Church in the city of Mary – an officially recognised branch of the registered Baptist Church of Ashgabat – for questioning because of allegations that he had received foreign funds to pay for summer camps held years earlier.³¹ When the police asked him to sign a statement admitting that he violated the law, he refused. As a result, he was warned not to organise his annual summer camp. During the same period, members of the Greater Grace Protestant Church in Ashgabat and Mary were fined 500 manats each (€125, US\$140) for illegal possession of religious literature in the town of Tejen, where they had gone to talk about their faith. Police also questioned four other members from Mary, seizing religious literature, telephones and money.³²

Some groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, are especially targeted by the authorities and law enforcement agencies because they tend to proselytise and publicly share their religious beliefs, as well as object to military service.

Law enforcement frequently raid their meetings, often beating the faithful, who are then arrested and fined as a result of searches in their flats, or because they are found speaking about their faith with neighbours or other people. For example, in April 2016, in Gazadzhak, Lebap Region, as a result of the search of the flat of one believer, five people were arrested and fined 100 manats (€25, US\$28). During that period, in Turkmenbashi, two Jehovah's Witnesses who read the Bible with their neighbours were arrested and fined for the same amount.³³ In some cases, violence was used in house raids in the presence of children.³⁴

Another Jehovah's Witness, Mansur Masharipov, 32, was arrested on 30th June 2016 in Ashgabat for allegedly attacking a police officer who had raided his flat in July 2014, during which religious literature, a computer and a mobile phone were seized. Despite denying the allegations and claiming that he was actually the victim of police brutality, Masharipov was sentenced to a year in prison on 18th August.³⁵

Other Jehovah's Witnesses have been sentenced to conditional or corrective labour for a period of one to two years, for refusing to perform compulsory military service.³⁶

An important source of problems for Protestant Christians is the widespread social prejudice against them, especially if they are converts from Islam. In this case, they face daily hostility from their own families, wider society and the authorities, putting them under strong pressure to return to Islam. Local mullahs preach against converts, and make sure the whole community is united against them. Because of the intense pressure, many converts try to hide their faith, becoming so-called "secret believers".³⁷

The government is, however, most interested in controlling the followers of Islam, which is the majority religion. The Sunni Muftiate (Muslim spiritual administration) is under strict state control and the chief mufti is a government appointee.³⁸ The Muftiate in turn appoints all the imams up to the district level, but the secret police have the main input, operating on the basis of information collected on the ancestry of candidates (who usually must be ethnic Turkmen), their relatives, political opinions and activities.³⁹ The sermons imams deliver during Friday prayers are used to convey state messages while the authorities "recommend" the topics imams can cover.⁴⁰ Any deviation from the centrally established line is strongly punished.

Very devout believers and people who theologically interpret Islamic religious doctrine in ways not considered acceptable in the country are deemed extremists and punished. The authorities often refer to these people as "Wahhabis". Inmates classified as Wahhabis are treated brutally and are often confined to special prison wards, banned from receiving visits or exchanging correspondence with the outside world.⁴¹ Many of them are locked up in the Ovadan-Depe maximum security prison in the Karakum Desert, 70 km north of Ashgabat.⁴²

One of the Wahhabis currently in prison is Bahram Saparov, 43,⁴³ a devout Muslim who led an informal group of Sunni scholars. He and 20 members of his group received long prison sentences in May 2013 for allegedly plotting against the constitutional order, inciting social and religious hatred and setting up an organised criminal association. The sentences were handed down in three trials, the last of which was in June 2016, which combined all convictions into a new single sentence of 15 years in prison.⁴⁴

Three members of the Saparov group – Lukman Yaylanov, Narkuly Baltaev⁴⁵ and Aziz Gafurov⁴⁶ – died between mid-2016 and 2017 in the Ovadan-Tepe prison, allegedly from torture.

At the end of a trial, a Turkmen court on 8th February 2017 convicted 18 men with sentences ranging from 12 to 25 years in prison, on the basis of various charges, including incitement to hatred and involvement in a criminal organisation. All the defendants were in some way linked to the Turkish-Turkmen schools affiliated to Muslim preacher Fethullah Gülen,⁴⁷ who has been accused by Turkish authorities of masterminding Turkey's July 2016 coup. In July 2017, another 40 men from the province of Lebap were convicted – on the basis of similar charges – and sentenced to long prison terms.⁴⁸

Prospects for freedom of religion

Since 2006, Turkmenistan has been ruled by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, who was re-elected for the third time in February 2017.

The stability of his totalitarian regime, which until recently was based on gas revenues that allowed the state to provide important subsidies to the population, faces unprecedented challenges as a result of the collapse in the prices of oil and natural gas, security threats along its border with Afghanistan, and the radicalisation of Central Asian youth.⁴⁹

In 2016, the president responded to the serious economic crisis by strengthening his institutional hold and that of his family by means of constitutional changes that removed the age limit for presidential candidates and extended the mandate from five to seven years,⁵⁰ and by appointing members of his family in leading positions in both the public and private sectors.⁵¹ Improbable political changes, coupled with the worsening economic situation and the almost complete lack of fundamental rights, including freedom of thought, belief, the press⁵² and politics, put the country at risk of greater domestic instability, which the government is likely to address with greater authoritarian rule.

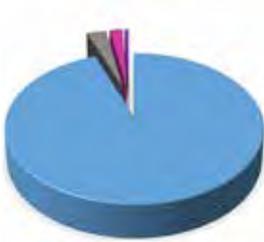
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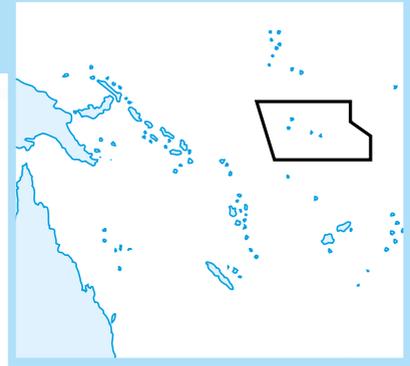
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RELIGION



- Christians: 94,4%
- Agnostics: 3%
- Baha'is: 2%
- Others: 0,6%



AREA
26km²

POPULATION
9.900

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The independent state of Tuvalu in the South Pacific is the fourth smallest country in the world.

Under the constitution, “no-one shall be hindered in the exercise of his freedom of belief”¹. This includes the freedom to change belief and to proselytise. The exceptions to this rule are unusually wide-ranging in comparison with similar constitutions. The right may be limited by law for reasons of defence, public order, safety, morality and health, but also if their exercise is “divisive, unsettling or offensive” to the “rights or feelings” of other people. According to the preamble, Tuvalu is “an independent state based on Christian principles, the Rule of Law, and Tuvaluan custom and tradition”. The protection given to freedom of religion applies equally to the right not to have a particular religion.

Over 90 percent of the population are members of the Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu (EKT), a Congregationalist Church. The EKT is the state Church and is entitled to perform special services at events of national importance. About 2 percent of the population are Baha’is and there are also small groups of Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, Muslims and Mormons. The nine islands have traditional chiefs who all follow the Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu. The majority of members of other religious faiths reside in the capital, Funafuti.

Religious groups with adult members who represent not less than 2 percent of the population must register with the state and can be prosecuted for failing to do so. Approval of the traditional elder councils (falekaupule) is needed in order to register.

Under the Religious Organisation Restriction Act 2010,² any religious group regardless of size must gain the approval of the falekaupule (elders assembly) of each island in order to conduct services there. Public religious worship by groups not approved by the elder councils is prohibited. The falekaupule may prevent religious groups from holding public meetings if they are believed to threaten the “values or culture” of the island.³ Groups that gather for unauthorised religious meetings could be fined up to \$500 AUD,⁴ and individuals who participate in unauthorised activities risk fines of \$200 AUD. Although this Act may be unconstitutional, it has not yet been challenged in court. Under the Act, individuals and households may worship freely within their own “residences”.

Over the past decade, members of minority religions have successfully shown in the Tuvalu courts that their constitutional right to freedom of religion has been breached or that they have been discriminated against on account of their religion.⁵ In the last few years, it has been reported that on some islands religious groups other than the EKT have met opposition from the traditional elders councils and have had to leave the island; on other islands missionaries have proselytised without restrictions.⁶

Religious minorities on the main island of Funafuti said they did not face any restrictions on their constitutional rights. It is reported that religious groups also exist without official approval and without hindrance on the outer islands.⁷ The EKT exercises significant influence on the social and political life of Tuvalu, but traditional culture and the EKT are so closely aligned that it can be hard to say whether such influence is religious or cultural.

Under the constitution, a religious community is entitled to establish, maintain and manage places of education. Religious education may be provided in schools, but there is no requirement to religious education classes or take part in worship if the student belongs to another religion. Leaders from some minority religious groups have said that students have sometimes been forced to attend EKT events.⁸

Incidents

It was reported that on 7th May 2016 a Jehovah's Witness family was evicted from Vaitupu because the father refused to contribute to building an EKT church.⁹

Prospects for freedom of religion

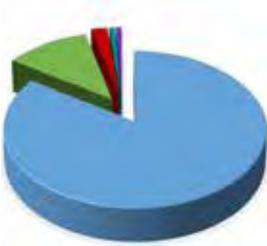
There is nothing to indicate change in the foreseeable future.

Endnotes

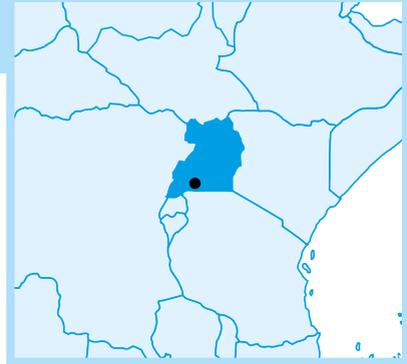
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UGANDA

RELIGION



● Christians: 84,4%
● Muslims: 11,8%
● Ethnoreligionists: 2,2%
● Hindus: 0,8%
● Others: 0,8%



UGANDA

AREA	POPULATION²
241.550km ²	40.323.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 29 (c) of the Ugandan constitution gives Ugandans the “freedom to practise any religion and manifest such practice, which shall include the right to belong to and participate in the practices of any religious body or organisation in a manner consistent with this constitution”.¹

The Religious Affairs Department of the Directorate for Ethics and Integrity (under the Office of the President) proposed a draft bill in mid-2017 that would expand the department’s vetting powers and allow it to regulate existing religious groups more broadly. The bill was aimed at the alleged lack of transparency of, and disharmony among, various faith-based groups.² It was also intended to stop corrupt and fraudulent practices carried out mainly by rogue clerics. Many “born-again” Churches claimed that the draft was an attack on freedom of worship, while other leaders and the Interreligious Council of Uganda welcomed the new legislation. At the time of writing, the bill had not yet passed into law.

In an unprecedented move, the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) issued an order in April 2017 banning all kinds of street preaching, especially where the preacher uses loudspeakers.³ Those guilty of an offence under the order are liable to a fine of 40,000 shillings (EUR€10, US\$11), two months of imprisonment or both. Some Christian groups saw this decision as an attack against Christianity. Other observers noted that the KCCA had no authority to make such a move without the prior approval of Parliament.⁴

More recently, some Christian Churches have been embroiled in a controversy over how much their religious activities are contributing to sound pollution in urban centres, because of the use of powerful sound systems to broadcast preaching, songs and services.⁵ This controversy may have been inspired by the actions of the Rwandan government, which closed down 700 churches in February 2017 because of the same problem.⁶

In March 2018, the governmental Uganda Communications Commission revoked the licences of 23 radio stations, accusing them of “promoting witchcraft”. It was stated that the radio stations used witch doctors and sorcerers to attract listeners. Some journalists demanded that the same kind of measure should be taken against stations which host fake pastors or fraudulent clergy.⁷

The main Christian and Muslim holy days are statutory holidays.

Incidents

On 29th June 2016 the Ugandan Christian University decided to ban all non-Anglican forms of worship on its campus.⁸

On 26th November 2016 Sheikh Mohammed Kiggundu (who was also a Major in the military) was gunned down along with his bodyguard in a Kampala suburb. At least a dozen Muslim leaders have been killed by unidentified perpetrators since 2012.⁹

Some of the killings of Muslim religious leaders seem to be related to internal struggles between rival Muslim factions. Police have linked the murders to rebel group Allied Democratic Forces in the east of the country.¹⁰ Sometimes, ideological differences¹¹ and disputes about real estate appear to have provoked the killings.¹²

Towards the end of December 2016, following an investigation, anti-terrorism units raided the Nakasero mosque (the headquarters of the Tabliq group), confiscated materials and made some arrests. Days later, a similar raid took place on another mosque in Kiwatule (east Uganda) and further arrests were made. All those arrested were released after several days.¹³

On 19th January 2017 some born-again evangelists were beaten by a crowd that accused them of propagating a false prophecy during a three-day crusade in Karira Sub-County (Budaka District).¹⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

In general, the situation seems to be a little more stable than during the previous reporting period, despite disputes within the Islamic community and murders of Muslim leaders. The situation of religious freedom in the country is not expected to change significantly in the foreseeable future.

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UKRAINE

RELIGION



- Christians: 86,1%
- Agnostics: 9,9%
- Atheists: 2,2%
- Muslims: 1,6%
- Others: 0,2%



AREA

603.500km²

POPULATION

44.624.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 35 of the constitution provides for freedom of religion and worship, as well as the separation of church and state. State schools are secular. It guarantees the right to conscientious objection on religious grounds. People can opt out of military service in favour of another activity not involving the Forces.¹

The “Law of Ukraine on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations” from 1991 states that a religious group wanting legal recognition should register with the Ministry of Culture (MOC), a government agency regulating religious affairs. The MOC oversees religious centres, missions, religious schools and religious associations. It is not possible for a religious organisation, which is active nationwide, to be recognised on a national level; registration is managed locally, in the places where such groups are active. While a non-religious group must have at least three members to be eligible for registration, the requisite minimum number for faith organisations is 10. Faith groups must also present a copy of their statutes to the local authorities. In addition, a religious group needs to be registered as a NGO with the Ministry of Justice.²

Recently, several draft bills have caused controversy. Bills 4511 and 4128 have been seen as directed against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP). A group of parliamentarians claimed that the Russian government might be using the UOC-MP to deepen religious divisions in the country and further destabilise it. The bills place UOC-MP churches in a special category as religious organisations “whose administrative centres are located in a state recognised ... as an aggressor state”, and they promote the transformation of such churches into members of the Kiev Patriarchate (UOC-KP).³ The draft law would not allow the UOC-MP to appoint bishops or promote clerics to senior positions without central government’s prior approval. In response, the UOC-MP decided to move its administrative centre to Kiev in November 2017.⁴ Catholic Bishop Jan Sobilo of Charkiv said the bill potentially threatened Catholics, since discussions on a religious group’s future could be subject to improper influence by outsiders.⁵

In 2017 controversy broke after reports that the MOC was delaying the re-registration of the UOC-MP statutes. MOC representatives claimed the statutes were not in line with

Ukrainian legislation, for example by omitting clauses stating its non-profit status. This delay was criticised by the UOC-MP leadership as arbitrary. In December 2017 the compulsory re-registration of Church statutes has been abolished by parliament. Currently, the entry of religious organisations to the register of non-profit organisations is guaranteed.⁶

According to the 2016 US International Religious Freedom Report, there were several instances of the government trying to tackle religious discrimination against minority religious groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, especially when the acts of oppression were carried out by local officials. The parliament's human rights' ombudsman successfully sought to overturn a 2015 ban directed against all religious groups present in Osytniazhka village, central Ukraine, except the local Orthodox community. Another example was the reversal of another ban from 2015, in the village of Otyniya, in the Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast. There, the local village council prohibited religious organisations from renting buildings owned by the authorities. In some cases, local courts overturned rulings against Jehovah's Witnesses fined for displaying their literature publicly.⁷

On 16th June 2016, parliament appealed to the Ecumenical Patriarch to recognise a united Ukrainian Orthodox Church. While the UOC-KP and UAOC supported the appeal, it was criticised by the UOC-MP as government "meddling" in religious affairs. In his annual address to the parliament on 6th September 2016, President Poroshenko declared that the government would not "watch indifferently" while Russia interfered in the country's ecclesiastical affairs. He advocated creating a united and independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church. UOC-MP representatives, on the other hand, continued to report discrimination against its members by both representatives and high-ranking supporters of the UOC-KP. The UOC-MP complained about the central government's allegedly inadequate response.⁸

There were several instances of discriminatory treatment by local authorities involving land allocated to minority religious groups for buildings, for example in Ivano-Frankivsk, Kirovohrad, Mykolayiv, Odesa, Ternopil Oblasts and the City of Kyiv. Roman Catholics, UOC-KP members, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) members, adherents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Muslims in the central and southern regions, reported similar discrimination. Meantime, the government was still refusing to return the Roman Catholic seminary in Odesa confiscated during Soviet times. Similar problems with restitution of former Roman Catholic Church (RCC) properties occurred in the city of Lviv and other cities in Western Ukraine, which in some cases had been turned over to Greek Catholics. The UGCC on the other hand, had difficulties obtaining land for its churches in Sumy and Odesa, while the UOC-MP reported similar issues in Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk. The same goes for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Kyiv, who reported that the city government was not helpful in the reinstatement of a lease of land, which was intended for the construction of a place of worship. The respective representatives of the religious communities stated that local authorities were obstructive. Roman Catholic representatives stated that the authorities were biased in their approach to restitution disputes.⁹

Eduard Dolinsky, the director of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee, criticised what has been described as the whitewashing of Second World War crimes committed by the

Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its military wing, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). While he commended the government's 75th-anniversary commemoration of the Babyn Jar Massacre, which resulted in the death of some 33,000 Jews during the Holocaust, he argued against the glorification of Ukrainian nationalists, who were often seen as complicit in such crimes. The apparent collaboration of the OUN-UPA during the Holocaust, as well as the massacres directed against Polish civilians, are reportedly being whitewashed by government-sponsored institutions such as the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory. Instead, its leaders and members are being honoured by having streets named after them. Since the parliament's 2015 Memory Law, which was widely criticised by activists and leading international scholars, there has been a state-supported movement to rehabilitate OUN-UPA fighters.¹⁰

Incidents

In the Oblasts of Luhansk and Donetsk, there were several instances where Russian-backed separatists imprisoned members of minority religious groups. The 2016 US International Religious Freedom Report highlighted the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses. On 24th June 2016, separatist "authorities" adopted the Law on the Freedom of Worship and Religious Associations, which banned the creation of "sects". The legislation requires all religious groups to register with the separatist leaders, who are given extensive powers to deny applications of this nature.¹¹

After the law was passed, several Kingdom Halls were seized by the separatists. For example, on 22nd July 2016 a religious service was interrupted in the city of Horlivka by armed men, who ordered everyone present to leave. They stated that the service had been organised by a banned religion. The gunmen reportedly vandalised the building afterwards. Three days later, there was a similar incident in the same city, where another Kingdom Hall was seized. Volodymyr Popkov, the local minister, was seized and reportedly interrogated. He was apparently told on pain of death to stop his religious activities. The minister was not released until the following day. The Russian-backed separatists also seized a church belonging to the Seventh-day Adventists and staged a demonstration against "sects" outside a church belonging to the UGCC. Several places of worship previously seized by the separatists are being used as military facilities. According to the executive director of the Institute for Religious Freedom, a Kyiv-based NGO this includes a complex of buildings belonging to Donetsk Christian University, a building of the Word of Life Bible Institute in Donetsk, and several places of worship of the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.¹²

Other examples of religious persecution in the separatist-controlled regions date from July and August 2017, when the Supreme Court of the Donetsk People's Republic placed two publications of the Jehovah's Witnesses on the Republican Extremist Material List. On 4th August, religious services held by the Jehovah's Witnesses were interrupted by anti-terror units, police and soldiers in Alchevsk and Luhansk. During a search of the building, they allegedly found propaganda pamphlets directed against the separatists. The Jehovah's Witnesses said the literature was forged and had been planted there.¹³

On 2nd February 2018 a new law was adopted in the area controlled by the Luhansk People's Republic, banning faith groups of five or more persons, which are not categorised as a "traditional religion".¹⁴

In occupied Crimea, the situation for the local Tatar population deteriorated further. The 2016 US State Department International Religious Freedom Report stated: "The occupation authorities subjected Muslim Crimean Tatars to abductions, forced psychiatric hospitalisations, imprisonment, and detentions, according to human rights and international organisations."¹⁵ Local police forces continually refused to investigate reported attacks on religious buildings belonging to the Crimean Tatar communities. Human rights groups reported that Russian media were running campaigns against Crimean Tatar Muslims. The media accused them of being linked to terrorist groups. A particular target has been the Bakhchisaray Mejlis (the executive-representative body of the Crimean Tatars), which in March 2016 was called an "extremist" organisation by the occupation authorities. Two months later, one of the Bakhchisaray Mejlis was kidnapped by uniformed men; others, meanwhile, were sent to psychiatric hospitals. More psychiatric hospitalisations and imprisonments were inflicted on Muslims accused of belonging to the Hizb ut-Tahrir, a Muslim organisation banned in Russia.¹⁶ According to a KyivPost report, pressure on Crimean Tatars intensified in the run up to the March 2018 Russian presidential elections.¹⁷

The RCC, UGCC and UOC-KP was also targeted in Crimea. Russian media speak out against the UOC-KP and UGCC, which they label "fascists" for allegedly taking sides in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. The UOC-KP said more than a third of its religious buildings were seized by the occupying authorities. The new Crimean authorities reportedly make it difficult for Catholic bishops wanting to send priests to parishes there.¹⁸

The Jewish community was concerned about Lviv's Krakivskiy Market which continued to be held on the site of an old Jewish cemetery. There were reports of vandalism at Holocaust memorials, synagogues, and Jewish cemeteries. According to the 2016 US State Department International Religious Freedom Report, the grave of Rabbi Aryeh Leib in Shpola, Cherkasy Oblast, was opened on 24th July 2016 and a Molotov cocktail thrown inside.

In Kharkiv, an unidentified man struck Israeli journalist Yitzhak Hildeshaimer from behind. The assailant reportedly performed a Nazi salute when Hildeshaimer turned around. After the attack, on 24th August 2016, the reporter said that his yarmulke was a likely reason for the attack.

In November and December 2016, a spate of anti-Jewish incidents took place – vandalism, verbal abuse and mockery of religious customs. These occurred in the cities of Chernivtsi, Uzhgorod and Uman. This last attack saw worshippers near a synagogue splashed with paint and sprayed with noxious gas. The authorities publicly condemned the attacks and opened investigations. On 31st December, again in Uman, a cross was vandalised. The police claimed it was a possible revenge attack in response to anti-Semitic incidents.¹⁹

Another, anti-Semitic incident took place in March 2017 when the Holocaust memorial in Ternopil city was spray-painted with a swastika and an SS logo.²⁰

Prospects for freedom of religion

The religious divisions in the country might be best symbolised by the case of a UOC-MP priest in Zaporozhe who denied a Christian burial to a toddler killed in an accident because the two-year-old had been baptized in a UOC-KP church. The accident happened in January 2018 when a man committing suicide jumped off the seventh floor of a building and fell on the child.²¹

Despite the armistice between the national forces and the Russian-backed separatists, there were many violations of human rights, including religious freedom. The separatists in Luhansk, Donetsk and Crimea continue to harass non-Orthodox religious groups. In the government-controlled areas, religious discrimination also occurs. The state continues a policy of downplaying World War II crimes and anti-Semitic incidents remain a problem. While the government attempted to reverse local authority measures discriminatory to religious minorities, overall there seem to be few signs of improvement. Religious freedom conditions remain acute.

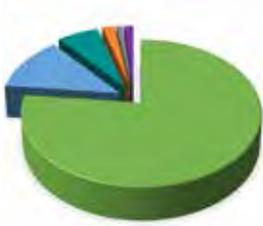
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UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

RELIGION



● Muslims: 76,7%
● Christians: 12,4%
● Hindus: 6,5%
● Buddhists: 1,9%
● Agnostics: 1,1%
● Others: 1,4%



AREA	POPULATION
83.600 km ²	9.267.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven emirates situated in the Persian Gulf. Dubai is politically and economically the most important of them.

According to the constitution of 1971,¹ Islam is the official religion in the federation. Article 7 reads: "Islam is the official religion of the UAE. The Islamic Shari'a is a main source of legislation in the UAE." Article 25 excludes discrimination based on religion. It reads: "All persons are equal in law. There shall be no distinction among the citizens of the UAE on the basis of race, nationality, faith or social status." Article 32 reads: "Freedom to exercise religious worship is guaranteed in accordance with the generally accepted traditions provided that such freedom is consistent with the public policy or does not violate the public morals."

Muslim citizens do not have the right to change religion. Apostasy in Islam is punishable by death. Apostasy is criminalised in accordance with hudud offences, which are based on Islamic law and incorporated in the country's Penal Code. These include "adultery, apostasy, murder, theft, highway robbery that involves killing, and a false accusation of committing adultery".² Article 1 of the penal code provides that Islamic law applies in hudud cases, including the payment of blood money and murder. Article 66 states that the "original punishments" under the law include punishments of hudud crimes, including the death penalty. No one, however, has been prosecuted or punished by a court for such an offence.

The law criminalises blasphemy and imposes fines and imprisonment as punishment. Insulting other religions is also banned. Non-citizens face deportation in case of blasphemy.

While Muslims may proselytise, penalties are in place for non-Muslims proselytising among Muslims. If caught, non-citizens may have their residency revoked and face deportation.

Shari'a law is applied in matters of personal status for Muslim citizens and residents. Muslim men may marry non-Muslim women 'of the book', i.e. Christians or Jews. Muslim women can only marry Muslim men. In the case of a mixed marriage between a Muslim

man and a non-Muslim woman, child custody is granted to the father. Non-Muslim wives are not eligible for naturalisation.

Muslims and non-Muslims are required by law to respect fasting hours during Ramadan.

The government controls content in almost every Sunni mosque. Textbooks and curricula in both private and public schools are censored by the Ministry of Education.³

Christian churches may not be adorned by bell towers or have crosses on them.

In July 2015, the UAE announced new legislation for crimes related to religious hatred and extremism. These included the death penalty. A presidential decree bans any act that stirs up religious hatred as well as discrimination “on the basis of religion, caste, creed, doctrine, race, colour or ethnic origin”.⁴ According to the decree carried by an official news agency, offenders risk up to 10 years in prison or the death penalty if convicted of “takfirism” (declaring other Muslims infidels) or Sunni Muslim extremism.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President and Ruler of Dubai, said the law “guarantees the freedom of individuals from religious intolerance ... and underpins the UAE’s policy of inclusiveness”.⁵ Jesuit priest Father Samir Khalil commented: “By doing this, the UAE has taken a step forward with regard to religious freedom, still the exception to the rule in Muslim countries.”⁶

Non-citizen residents come mainly as guest workers from South and South East Asia, but also from the Middle East, Europe and North America. Although recent numbers are not available, the majority of residents are Muslims. According to the last census (2005), more than three-quarters of the population are Muslims, with Christians the next largest group.⁷

The Catholic Church is present through the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia (AVOSA) with its seat in Abu Dhabi, currently occupied by Bishop Paul Hinder. Eight Catholic parishes and nine schools operate in the UAE. The number of Catholics is estimated to be around 800,000.⁸

There are also Protestant and Orthodox communities. In total, more than 35 churches operate as well as two Hindu temples. Given the large numbers of worshippers, they are often overcrowded.

Incidents

According to the International Religious Freedom Report for 2016⁹, the UAE government continues to provide land for Christian churches (as well as Sikh and Hindu temples). It also provides land for non-Islamic cemeteries and cremation facilities for the country’s large Hindu community.

In November 2016, UAE authorities held a conference¹⁰ to discuss ways to promote tolerance and understanding. Religious representatives were among the invited guests, among them Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, the most senior cleric in the Church of England, and Dr Ahmed El Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al Azhar and president of the UAE’s

Muslim Council of Elders. It was decided that a union would be formed for youth from various cultures and nationalities and aimed at improving and encouraging tolerance.

In June 2017, Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE armed forces, Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, ordered that the Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Mosque be renamed "Mary, Mother of Jesus". This decision was taken in order to "consolidate bonds of humanity between followers of different religions".¹¹ The move to rename the mosque reflects UAE initiatives to promote religious tolerance in the region.

In December 2017, UAE Prime Minister and Dubai Emir Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum declared that the pedestrian bridge over the recently built Dubai Canal be named "Tolerance Bridge".¹² He had previously tweeted that "Love and tolerance are bridges of communication and a universal language, binding humanity across different languages, religions and cultures". He added that "these are the foundations of the Emirates".

From 11th - 13th December 2017 the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies was organised in Abu Dhabi. Hosted by the Emirati Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the theme of this fourth round of the Forum was "Global Peace and the Fear of Islam: Countering the Spread of Extremism".¹³ A joint cooperation agreement between the United Nations and the Forum was announced by Undersecretary-General and United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng. This cooperation consists in organising 10 research workshops to promote religious education in the Islamic world.¹⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

One can expect freedom of religion to improve in the coming years in the UAE. Local Church leaders describe the atmosphere as friendly and praise the open atmosphere in the country.¹⁵ George,¹⁶ a Maronite Christian born to Lebanese parents, told ACN: "The UAE is a good place for Christians to live in. There are limits, of course, but respecting them [means] one has a good life there." The new law against religious hatred is a hopeful sign.

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UNITED KINGDOM

RELIGION



● Christians: 59,3%
● Muslims: 4,8%
● Hindus: 1,4%
● Jews: 0,5%
● Sikhs: 0,7%
● Others: 33,3%



AREA	POPULATION
242.514km ²	64.500.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The UK is signatory to international conventions on human rights which hold it to commitments regarding religious freedom and belief, such as the European Convention on Human Rights. The convention, which outlines the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Article 9), was incorporated into UK law in the Human Rights Act (1988), although it only fully came into force in 2000.

The Church of England, as the established church in England, has dominated public religious life for more than 450 years and enjoys a small number of legal privileges, for example 26 Anglican bishops sit in the UK parliament's House of Lords. Although the majority of the UK population still broadly identify with Christianity – according to the last census 59.3 percent self described as Christian¹ – regular Church attendance fell dramatically during the late 20th century.² Immigration and demographic changes have contributed to the growth of other faiths, most notably Islam.

Although Religious Education is a legal requirement in state-funded schools in England, more than a quarter of the country's secondary schools do not offer religious education. Fiona Moss of the National Association for RE warned that schools would produce students that were "not religiously literate".³ During the period under review, a number of public figures including Aaqil Ahmed, head of religion at the BBC, and Justin Welby, the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, expressed concerns over rising levels of religious illiteracy.⁴

According to the Pew Forum's last assessment while government restrictions of religious freedom remained low, social hostilities were high.⁵ Home Office data shows an increase in "racially or religiously aggravated offences" from April 2016, peaking in July 2016 (5,949 religious hate crimes were reported for 2016-17). "These increases fit the widely reported pattern of an increase in hate crime following the EU referendum."⁶ Additionally, religious believers have experienced discrimination when their own beliefs conflict with changing societal norms.

Incidents

Related to Judaism

For 2017 the Community Security Trust recorded 1,382 anti-Semitic incidents – the highest annual total recorded by the organisation. This included a 34 percent increase in the number of assaults recorded which rose to 145. Increased assaults on individuals perceived to be “foreign” following the result of the Brexit referendum and publicity regarding controversies about alleged and actual antisemitism in the Labour Party were reckoned to be among factors in the increase. The 2017 figure of 1,382 incidents marked an increase from 2016 when there were 1,346 anti-Semitic incidents. Every month from May to December 2016 there were more than 100 incidents, the majority involving the verbal abuse of recognisably Jewish people. 22 percent of the overall total involved abuse on social media. There were also 107 violent incidents, mostly minor.⁷

In September 2017, an elderly man was making his way to a synagogue in London when a white man aggressively grabbed his prayer book and skullcap, throwing both to the ground. In the same month two men of Middle Eastern appearance shouted at a Rabbi from their vehicle: “F**k off back to Israel, you Israeli C**t.”⁸ In 22 anti-Semitic incidents in 2017, the victims were Jewish students or academics, compared to 41 incidents in 2016. A survey found more than a quarter of Jewish students who responded had experienced personal abuse including through social media. Most (65 percent) did not believe the NUS would “respond appropriately” to allegations of anti-Semitism following allegations of anti-Semitic remarks by NUS personnel, including its 2016-17 President, Malia Bouattia who removed Jewish students’ ability to elect a representative on the union’s national anti-racism committee.⁹

Related to Islam

Incidents more than doubled between 2016 and 2017 – with police recording 110 crimes between March and July 2017, up from 47 over the same six-month period in 2016. Fiyaz Mughal, Director of Faith Matters which works to increase community cohesion, said Islamist terrorism was the biggest factor driving hate crime, but that people felt uncomfortable saying so.¹⁰ In particular, the June 2017 London Bridge attack triggered attacks on British Muslims, with a fivefold increase in the three days following the incident. There were reports of Muslim women being verbally abused on buses, or spat at; one lady was grabbed by the throat at a bus stop.¹¹ Racist abuse, acts of vandalism and bomb threats were among reported hate crimes directed at mosques across the UK. One person was killed and 12 injured when 48-year-old Darren Osborne drove a van into a group of Muslims near Finsbury Park mosque in north London. In February 2018 Mr Osborne was sentenced to a minimum of 48 years for a terrorist offence.¹²

In September 2017, five days after a radicalised teenager detonated a bomb on a tube train at Parsons Green station, injuring 50 people, a 47-year-old mother was run down by a car in Leicester. The impact threw Zaynab Hussein, who was returning from the school where she had just dropped off her two youngest children, against the wall of a nearby house. As she lay on the pavement the vehicle reversed over her. Mrs Hussein was later

hospitalised with a broken leg and arm as well as severe fractures to her pelvis and spine. Her injuries have substantially restricted her mobility. The car then tried to hit a 12-year-old girl on her way to school, but she was only clipped. Both victims were wearing obviously Islamic headscarves. In March 2018, a jury found the driver, 21-year-old Paul Moore, guilty of attempted murder, grievous bodily harm with intent, and dangerous driving. He was given a life sentence.¹³

Related to Christianity

Christians are experiencing problems when their religious views conflict with current political norms on gender and sexuality. Liberal Democrat MP Tim Farron felt pressured to quit as party leader after a media row over his personal religious views about gay sex during the 2017 general election campaign.¹⁴ An August 2017 Employment Appeal Tribunal found against Pentecostal pastor Barry Trayhorn, who was suspended for “homophobic comments” for quoting 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 in a May 2014 chapel service.¹⁵ Mrs Justice Slade said that the biblical passage quoted was “derogatory against homosexuals” and could “legitimise bullying or other mistreatment”.¹⁶ In October 2017 the High Court for England and Wales upheld Sheffield University’s decision to expel MA student Felix Ngole from his Social Work course for publicly posting on his Facebook page in support of American clerk Kim Davis. Judge Rowena Collins Rice ruled that although the university’s actions were “indeed severe” the perceived risk of damage justified them, as “they could be accessed and read by people who would perceive them as judgemental, incompatible with service ethos, or suggestive of discriminatory intent... whatever the actual intention was, it was the perception of the posting that would cause the damage”.¹⁷

In 2016 magistrate Richard Page, 71, was sacked after telling a same-sex couple that ideally children should be raised by a mother and father. The Christian man had previously been reprimanded and had to undertake “re-education training”.¹⁸ Similarly, South Derbyshire Magistrate Susan Preston was given a formal warning for misconduct by the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office and ordered to stand down from hearing future family cases, after declining to sit on a case involving same-sex parenting because to her personal religious views.¹⁹ A Christian couple was stopped from adopting their foster children, after expressing the view that children should have a mother and a father wherever possible.²⁰

After figures on hate crime in Scotland showed Roman Catholics are more targeted than any other religious group, MSP Elaine Smith, Scottish Labour’s inequality spokesperson, said members of the religious group need more protection.²¹ A BBC Scotland video parodying the reception of Communion in the Catholic Church was described by Bishop John Keenan of Paisley as “offensive to Catholics in both the words and images used”.²²

Related to Religious Schools

Conservative Jewish schools, particular private Haredi intuitions, have come under increasing pressure from OFSTED over same-sex issues.²³ Vishnitz Girls School failed three OFSTED inspections in 2016 and 2017, partly for not teaching primary school children aged between three and eight about homosexuality or gender reassignment.²⁴ An October 2016 report concluded that, because of the lack of teaching in this area, “the school

does not encourage pupils to have respect for other people".²⁵ The private girls' school was not the only Jewish school to clash with OFSTED on the issue. In February 2017 Beth Jacob Grammar School in Hendon, which was ranked outstanding five years ago, was downgraded to inadequate.²⁶ OFSTED noted that pupils were "not taught explicitly about issues such as sexual orientation", while acknowledging that "pupils are taught the importance of respecting and appreciating all people as part of their Jewish faith". Beis Aharon Primary School for Boys in Stamford Hill received six visits from OFSTED inspectors in two years, and the Secretary of State issued an order preventing it from admitting new pupils. While it improved in a number of areas of concern, as of the last inspection in March 2017 the independent school was still being criticised for the "quality of education", for not teaching children aged between three and 13 about LGBT+ issues.²⁸ Summing up after the school lost an appeal against the restriction, Judge Hugh Brayne said failure to teach students about same-sex relationships and gender reassignment "prevents the school from encouraging respect for people who have such characteristics".²⁹

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education Amanda Spielman singled out faith schools for criticism. She said: "We have found an increasing number of conservative religious schools where the legal requirements that set the expectations for shared values and tolerance clash with community expectations."³⁰ Tottenham MP David Lammy said: "We've stood by, helpless to stop what many regard as the escalating offensive on Jewish education," and criticised what he called the "overtones of Soviet ideology" in Spielman's conflation of "British values" with "secular values, which every school in the land must inculcate into children".³¹ LGBT+ issues were not specifically covered in the British values for schools launched in 2014, and while respect and tolerance for LGBT+ individuals were implicit, there was nothing to suggest explicit teaching about lifestyle was required.³² Nor would the failure of the Vishnitz Girls School to teach pupils about homosexuality explicitly violate any existing equality legislation, raising serious questions about OFSTED's interpretation of government guidance.³³

Prospects for freedom of religion

The peak in religiously linked hate crime was connected to wider factors. While it is hoped that there will be a drop in such offences as these factors are no longer current, nevertheless each reporting period sees new triggers and continued attacks of varying severity.

The right to manifest religious views is being denied when beliefs conflict with current, progressive norms on gender and sexuality: individuals and institutions are being penalised for expressing traditional religious view of morality, even when done objectively and with no intention of causing offence. There is every reason to fear that as the debate on gender and sexuality moves further away from traditional models that those religious groups and individuals who articulate their views in this area will be increasingly sanctioned by governmental and legal institutions.

Endnotes

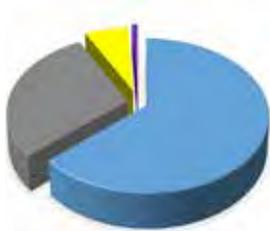
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URUGUAY

RELIGION



- Christians: 63,46%
- Agnostics: 29%
- Atheists: 6,7%
- Others: 34,91%



AREA	POPULATION
173.626km ²	3.444.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Under article five, the constitution provides for religious freedom and maintains a strict separation between religious organisations and the state.¹ The Penal Code criminalises anyone who incites hatred, contempt or any form of moral or physical violence or carries out such violence against one or more individuals because of their religion. The same applies to anyone who attacks a place of worship or destroys religious objects or hinders or disturbs a religious ceremony.²

The constitution recognises in article five the Catholic Church's ownership of places of worship that have been built "wholly or partly from funds from the National Treasury", with the sole exception of "chapels dedicated for use by asylums, hospitals, prisons, or other public establishments".

Article five also states that religious organisations benefit from exemptions from all forms of taxation that would otherwise apply to their places of worship. This is the case provided that they make a successful application for such exemptions to the Ministry of Education and Culture. Dioceses of the Catholic Church also benefit from tax exemptions.³

Under law 15.739, public education must respect "the independence of the moral and civic conscience of the student". The National Board of Public Education must assert, among other things, the principles of secularism, defend moral values and human rights and promote respect for the convictions and beliefs of others.⁴

The Abortion Law (Law No. 18.987) recognises, under article 10, that institutions may object to the practice of the termination of pregnancies. It also recognises in article 11 the right of physicians and medical personnel to refuse to take part in these procedures on the grounds of conscientious objection.⁵ The Code of Medical Ethics, which has the force of law, also recognises in articles 40 and 41 the right to conscientious objection on the grounds of personal beliefs.⁶

Incidents

In June 2016 the Council of Primary Education authorised school visits by Bishop Alberto Sanguinetti. The decision came at the request of the bishop who claimed the visits were for the benefit of society. Civic associations defending the separation of state and religion questioned the authorisation.⁷

In August 2016 the Council of Rectors of Uruguay's private universities criticised a bill that excludes private universities from benefitting from tax exemptions which apply to charitable donations in other contexts. The Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a statement supporting the Council of Rectors.⁸

In December 2016 President Tabaré Vázquez visited Pope Francis. The Pope said the Vatican was willing to open files that may contain information about crimes against humanity committed under Uruguay's former dictatorship. The president invited the Pope to visit Uruguay.⁹

In May 2017 the Departmental Board of Montevideo rejected a request to place a statue of the Virgin Mary in a busy part of Montevideo. The Catholic Church criticised the decision, saying it discriminated against the Catholic community.¹⁰

In September 2017 the 17th Annual Colloquium of the Latin American Consortium for Religious Freedom was held in Montevideo. It began with a meeting between academics and Uruguayan senators who reflected on 100 years of separation between the state and religion. The meeting also looked at recent legislation on freedom of conscience and religion.¹¹

In October 2017 the portal of the Jewish Central Committee of Uruguay posted an interview with Father Julio Fernández Techera, rector of the Catholic University, which touched on topics such as the place of religion in a secular country. The rector noted that for the Church, the university is a place of dialogue between faith and science and other beliefs and cultures. He explained that this is why the Catholic University has a permanent Chair of Judaism and a Chair of Islam and the Arab world.¹²

In December 2017 the Judeo-Christian Confraternity of Uruguay celebrated its 60th anniversary. The Minister of Education and Culture, who attended the event, stressed that dialogue which respects differences is the basis for a peaceful society. He congratulated the association on its contributions in this regard.¹³

In January 2018 Cardinal Daniel Sturla made a public statement in defence of freedom of religion and addressed a number of issues such as the public expression of religiosity, abortion and gender ideology.¹⁴ Feminist groups reacted to Cardinal Sturla's statements. One group said that the prelate's views on gender go against equality policies aimed at countering domestic violence.¹⁵

In March 2018 on International Women's Day, the Catholic Church expressed its gratitude to and appreciation of women, and highlighted their incalculable contribution to humanity. It also noted that "there is an urgent need to achieve the equality of rights and duties that are inherent in a democratic society."¹⁶

Also in March 2018 the National Institute for Human Rights and the Protection of Citizens' Rights (INDDHH) expressed concern that, during a feminist march, stones and paint bombs were thrown at the church in Cordón. The INDDHH stated that respect for different ideas and beliefs was paramount and that freedom of expression and peaceful protest should be guaranteed.¹⁷

Prospects for freedom of religion

In the period under review, the situation of freedom of religion has not changed noticeably. Government, academics, clergy and civil society organisations all participate in dialogue about the place of religion in public life. Discussions about freedom of religion often centre on the level of secularism in the country. There are no indications to suggest that the situation of religious freedom is likely to alter much in years to come.

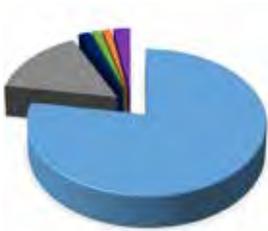
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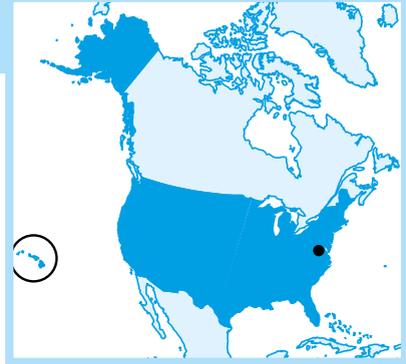
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

RELIGION



- Christians: 77,7%
- Agnostics: 15,3%
- Jewish: 1,7%
- Muslims: 1,4%
- Buddhists: 1,3%
- Others: 20,2%



AREA	POPULATION
9.833.517 km ²	324.119.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The first amendment to the US constitution guarantees religious freedom, stating that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”¹ The fourteenth amendment to the US constitution guarantees the equal protection of the laws and the right to due process to “all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof;”² including all religious and non-religious people. Article six of the US constitution mandates that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.”³ The constitutions of the 50 states have similar mandates.

Collectively, these state and federal constitutional provisions guarantee the free exercise of religion for all individuals and religious communities and prohibit an established religion. As Chief Justice John Roberts puts it, the national government “possesses only limited powers; the states and the people retain the remainder.”⁴ The federal Bill of Rights and various states’ Declaration of Rights serve the same purpose: to ensure that individuals and groups will have legal remedies when governments encroach on specified fundamental rights that exist prior to the state, and therefore are not created by the state. The first of those rights is the free exercise of religion. The role of government is to recognise, protect, and encourage the free exercise of religion in public life, in part by forbidding a state establishment of religion.

The guarantee of free exercise of religion and the ban on establishment and religious tests for public office work to limit the power and reach of the state. They also encourage “common good” contributions by faith-based institutions as part of America’s traditionally vigorous civil society, including hospitals and clinics, universities, primary and secondary schools, orphanages, immigration services, hospices for the sick and dying, soup kitchens, and the like. One study estimates that religion contributes US\$1.2 trillion to the US economy each year, which is more than the annual revenues of the top 10 tech companies combined and “would make US religion the 15th largest national economy in the world.”⁵

In addition to the constitutional provisions identified above, the following statutes, listed chronologically, are included in the legal framework for religious freedom in the United States:

- The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination “on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex”. Title Seven of the Act “requires that employers reasonably accommodate applicants’ and employees’ sincerely held religious practices, unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the operation of the employer’s business.”⁶

- The Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 states that “Government shall not substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability.” The only cases where the government is permitted to “substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion” is if “the application of the burden to the person (1) is in furtherance of a compelling government interest; and (2) is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling government interest”. Twenty-one states have also enacted Religious Freedom Restoration Acts.⁷

- The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 prohibits discriminatory land use regulation against “a person, including a religious assembly or institution,” and guarantees free exercise of religion to institutionalised persons.

Incidents

In the last few years, there has been an increase in the levels of reported violence and discrimination against religious minorities in the United States, particularly Muslims and Jews. The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) most recent Hate Crimes Statistics Report shows that 1,538 “hate crimes motivated by religious violence” were reported by law enforcement in 2016. About 55 percent of the crimes were classified as anti-Jewish, while approximately 25 percent were classified as anti-Islamic.⁸

This and previous FBI reports display a troubling trend in the United States. Since 2014, the number of reported “hate crimes” motivated by religious bias has increased by about 41 percent. Examples of such crimes include assault, intimidation, and vandalism of property. The proportion of crimes motivated by religious violence that are classified as anti-Islamic has increased by over eight percent during this same period of time. More broadly, the proportion of all incidents characterised as being motivated by religious bias has increased in the last two years. Incidents motivated by religious bias are now the second-most reported category, trailing only those motivated by racial bias and surpassing those motivated by sexual orientation bias.⁹ The fact that these figures do not reflect the crimes or incidents of discrimination motivated by religious bias that go unreported each year should not be taken lightly.

The existence of these troubling trends in violence and discrimination is further substantiated by public polling of religious minorities, as well as by reporting on the number of active groups in the United States whose bias against religion in general or against particular religions is characteristic of their extremist views. Crimes against Muslims have reached the highest level since the aftermath of the 11th September 2001 attacks. The number of anti-Muslim groups in the United States tripled in 2016.¹⁰ In a 2017 Pew Research Center survey, 75 percent of US Muslims agreed that there is “a lot of discrimination against Muslims in the United States”, while 50 percent agreed that “in recent years,

being Muslim in the United States has gotten more difficult.”¹¹ The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding’s “American Muslim Poll 2017” similarly reports that “Muslims are the most likely faith group to report religious-based discrimination in the past year,” with 60 percent of Muslims surveyed reporting such discrimination in 2016-2017.¹²

Specific instances of anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish violence and discrimination in the last few years include the murder of an imam and his assistant in New York, multiple counts of arson against mosques in Florida, Texas, and Washington State, “waves of bomb threats targeting the Jewish community,” and multiple incidents involving the desecration of headstones in Jewish cemeteries.¹³

An equally troubling trend in the United States is the decline in support for the free exercise of religion in public life, especially for the expression of non-violent religious views that have recently become unpopular. In a 2016 report from the US Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR), an institution established by Congress to ensure protection of the civil rights of all Americans, Chairman Martin Castro wrote that “phrases like ‘religious liberty’ and ‘religious freedom’ will stand for nothing except hypocrisy so long as they remain code words for discrimination, intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, Christian supremacy or any form of intolerance.” Mr Castro then went on to write that “as in the past, religion is being used as both a weapon and a shield by those seeking to deny others equality,” broadly comparing religious freedom arguments in today’s political and legal discourse to those used to justify slavery and Jim Crow laws in previous centuries.¹⁴ The USCCR, created at the dawn of the civil rights movement in 1957, describes itself as “an independent, bipartisan, fact-finding federal agency,” whose “mission is to inform the development of national civil rights policy and enhance enforcement of federal civil rights laws.”¹⁵

Mr Castro’s views, expressed in an official US government publication, are representative of an increasingly visible cultural movement in America to marginalise and exclude from public discourse the ideas and arguments of long-standing American religious communities. A recent reflection of this trend can be seen in the Supreme Court’s 5-4 decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), which declared a new right to same-sex marriage throughout the United States. This decision effectively ended public debate about same-sex marriage at a time when only 17 of 50 states had taken action to recognise same-sex marriage, and polls showed that 39 percent of US adults were opposed to same-sex marriage, including 66 percent of black Protestants and 76 percent of white evangelical Protestants.¹⁶ Chief Justice John Roberts, writing in dissent, called the decision, “an act of will, not of legal judgement. The right it announces has no basis in the Constitution or in this Court’s precedent.” The Chief Justice and three other dissenting justices warned that the free exercise of religion was imperilled by the decision and traditional religious voices were likely to be silenced because they did not align with the Court’s views.¹⁷

This case reflects a broader cultural trend in the United States to delegitimise traditional religious views on sexuality, marriage, human rights, and other matters of law and public policy. The trend undermines both the No Religious Test Clause of Article VI and the First Amendment, both of which were written to protect all religious ideas and actors in

public life, based on the conviction that the involvement of religion in the public square is necessary for the health of American democracy. The trend threatens the freedom of Christians, Muslims, Jews, and adherents of other faith traditions, who are increasingly condemned when they contend for laws and public policies on an equal footing with their more liberal and/or secular peers. It reflects an anti-pluralist movement in American political and social life that represents a serious threat to religious freedom and democracy itself.

The United States has seen incidents of religion-related terrorism. In 2016, of nine incidents with fatalities that were classified as terrorism by the Global Terrorism Database, four were committed by Jihadis or Muslim extremists.¹⁸ The deadliest attack was the 12th June 2016 attack on the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida committed by Omar Mateen, who pledged allegiance to Daesh (ISIS). In 2017, eight people were killed and more than a dozen injured in an attack carried out by Sayfullo Habibullaevic Saipov. Saipov drove a truck into pedestrians near the World Trade Center in New York City. A note found near the truck indicated that the attack had been carried out in the name of Daesh.¹⁹

Prospects for freedom of religion

The prospects for religious freedom in the United States over the coming years are mixed. On the one hand, the Trump administration has offered consistent rhetorical support for the protection of religious freedom. This rhetoric has been accompanied by certain potentially fruitful actions, including a Presidential Executive Order directing the Attorney General to issue guidance on interpreting religious liberty in federal law. The resulting guidance included “20 high-level principles that administrative agencies and executive departments can put to practical use to ensure the religious freedoms of Americans are lawfully protected”²⁰ and led to the creation of a Conscience and Religious Freedom Division within the Department of Health and Human Services.²¹ Such federal actions, including renewed support by the Department of Justice for judicial cases dealing with religious freedom, inspire some hope. To the extent that they increase religious freedom for all American citizens and groups, they may yield at least a short-term slowing of the negative trends cited above.

Within American civil society, there is a recognition of the need to address the growing polarisation around religious liberty issues. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops represents one of the leading actors working to protect and promote religious freedom in the United States today. The bishops voted in June 2017 to make permanent its Committee for Religious Liberty. They are major advocates for the promotion and defence of religious freedom in law and policy, including through the release of substantive educational materials.

However, there remain a number of reasons why both religious and non-religious Americans should be concerned about the future of religious freedom in the United States. A central reason is the increase in violence and discrimination against non-Christians. This has taken place as anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish extremist groups, such as the white nationalist movement, have become increasingly visible and vocal on the national stage,

most infamously in the Charlottesville, Virginia rally of August 2017.²² The failure of President Trump and other officials at all levels of government to condemn, unequivocally and consistently, such acts of violence and discrimination seriously harms religious freedom in the United States. The increasing normalisation of anti-Muslim rhetoric in American political life, combined with the spread of inaccurate, biased media accounts that vilify entire religious groups, both minority and majority, will only serve to magnify these patterns in the near future.²³

Viewed from a long-term perspective, the protection and promotion of religious freedom in the United States are at a critical juncture. The American understanding of religious freedom acknowledges the value that religion has for individuals and society in general, including interior spiritual benefits and public benefits that help to advance the common good. Critical to this understanding is the idea that religion deserves special protection, both at the level of individual conscience and at the level of public action, for all individuals and all religious communities, so that everyone can engage equally in religiously inspired action in the public square. This understanding of religious freedom is a pillar of the American experiment in democracy and has made substantial contributions to the nation's success over the last two and half centuries.

Religious freedom is necessary for the health of American democracy, and any decline in religious freedom would be detrimental to American society. If religious and non-religious Americans of all stripes do not take action to protect this freedom, it could eventually be lost.

Endnotes

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UZBEKISTAN

RELIGION¹



- Muslims: 94,6%
- Agnostics: 3%
- Christians: 1,2%
- Others: 1,2%



AREA	POPULATION
448.969 km ²	30.300.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Although freedom of belief is a constitutionally guaranteed right,¹ various regulations limit its effective exercise.

The main restrictions were introduced with a 1998 law on freedom of conscience. This includes the obligation of religious groups to register, a ban on proselytism and religious education limited to religious schools officially recognised by the state.² All religious literature must be approved by the Religious Affairs Commission; moreover, even in the case of texts that have passed the difficult process of state censorship, the official government line is that religious material can be kept only in places strictly set aside for worship and registered as such by the state, not in private homes.³ Such a ban creates special problems for those communities that, in the absence of registration, do not have places to keep the sacred books.⁴

Any violation of the regulations is severely punished under various articles of both the administrative and criminal code. In April 2016, the government increased the penalties for violations of the law on religion, introducing criminal proceedings even in the absence of any prior administrative sanction and increasing prison sentences for those involved in illegal religious organisations, especially if children younger than 16 are involved.⁵ Under the same provision, it is possible to impose a prison sentence of five to eight years to punish the dissemination of extremist religious ideas via the Internet and other means of mass communication.⁶

The sudden death of President Islam Karimov in September 2016 after 27 in power brought an end to a premiership where there was no respect for human rights. His replacement, former Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev, stated his wish to build “a democratic state and a just society” with human rights to the fore.⁷ The United Nations now has access to the country for the very first time.⁸

That said, regulation of religious life, even in the name of the fight against extremism, and the absence of other basic rights, such as the rights of association and expression, seriously restrict religious freedom.⁹

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has listed Uzbekistan as a country of particular concern since 2006.¹⁰

Incidents

Christians who do not belong to the Russian Orthodox Church are treated with particular severity. Labelled “extremists”, or otherwise viewed as an alien and destabilising force in society, they have been the victims of controls, police raids, fines, brief detentions and beatings.¹¹ Converts from Islam to Christianity suffer further pressure from their social and cultural milieus.¹²

For the first time, in July 2017, Christians were granted access to the Bible in the Uzbek language, printed with state approval and distributed in 3,000 copies.¹³

The authorities, however, have carried out countless raids in private homes, ending in most cases with the seizure of religious material, and with fines equal to 20 times (but sometimes 200 times) the minimum monthly wage,¹⁴ for the illegal possession of religious material or taking part in unauthorised religious meetings. In some cases, even short-term prison sentences were imposed.

In Urgench, the local unregistered Baptist community has frequently been at the centre of police attention. Its pastor, Rev Stanislav Kim, was sentenced in August 2016 to two years of corrective labour, with 20 percent of his wages seized by the state. His crime was possession of unauthorised religious books.¹⁵ He was subsequently fined, together with fellow Baptist Oybek Rahimov, for amounts equal to 100 and 90 times the monthly minimum wage respectively.¹⁶ Two weeks after his flat was raided while a religious meeting was under way, Rev Ahmadjon Nazarov was followed on his way to Kungrad to visit fellow Baptists. Here, the police broke into the house where they were gathered, seized electronic devices and Christian texts and subjected all those present to forced questioning. One person was detained for 15 days for resisting a public officer and four others were fined.¹⁷

The situation of religious believers in the north-western region of Karakalpakstan is particularly hard. With the exception of the mosques that belong to the state-controlled Musahedral and a Russian Orthodox parish, no other community has been allowed to exist.¹⁸ Here, in April 2017, four Protestants – Atamurat Tajimuratov, Salamat Biskeyev, Joldasbai Zhanabergenov and Marat Mambetaliyev – were sentenced to 15 days in prison for holding a religious meeting in a private home. Five more people present at the meeting were each given a fine worth 40 times the minimum monthly salary.¹⁹

Jehovah’s Witnesses have also been subjected at least 185 police raids between September 2016 and July 2017. These raids have resulted in 155 convictions, 148 fines and seven short-term detentions. During the interrogations, the police severely tortured 15 believers and some women were sexually assaulted.²⁰

A positive development was the release on parole on 8th November 2017 of the only non-Muslim prisoner of conscience, Baptist Tohar Haydarov, 33, who had been sentenced to ten years in prison in March 2010 for alleged drug offences.²¹

Muslims, too, faced countless obstacles to their right freely to practise their faith. Up to and including 2016, state authorities continued to suppress public displays of religiosity, including women wearing the hijab and men with long bears.²² During Ramadan in 2016, the authorities in the capital Tashkent banned sharing the iftar meal in public places such as restaurants and mosques.²³ They also used various methods to monitor closely the presence of minors during religious services, going so far as to put teachers and policemen in front of mosques to control comings and goings.²⁴

Some positive steps were taken after Mirziyoyev took power. They include, among others, the release of some political prisoners and the removal of the names of more than 16,000 people from a security blacklist of 17,000 potential Muslim religious extremists.²⁵ The approach to religious education also changed. No longer viewed with suspicion, it is now deemed an indispensable tool to prevent the spread of religious fanaticism²⁶ among young people and a way to rehabilitate those who fall under the influence of extremist ideology.²⁷ Some initiatives were undertaken to allow Muslims to fulfil their religious duties more easily, such as lifting restrictions on civil servants who want to participate in Friday prayers,²⁸ introducing the Halal standard for food²⁹ and re-establishing for the first time since 2005 the azan (call to prayer).³⁰

Despite these positive developments, thousands of Muslims, who have practised their religion outside strict state controls, remain in prison, sentenced to long prison terms on vague charges of extremism or anti-constitutional activity.³¹

Muslims found in possession of religious material on mobile phones or other electronic devices received prison sentences, heavy ones in some cases.³² This is what happened, for example, to two cousins, Jonibek Turdiboyev and Mansurkhon Akhmedov, sentenced in June 2016 to five years in prison for possession of an audio disk with Muslim sermons on it,³³ as well as Bakhtiyor Khudaiberdiyev, a Russian citizen, sentenced in August 2016 to six years in prison for having verses of the Qur'an on his phone.³⁴

Conducting religious activities outside the places specifically designated for worship has caused serious problems for some Muslims. In June 2016, following a police raid during a religious meeting in a house in the Bukhara region, four Sufi Muslims were sentenced to four years in prison; 11 more were given fines worth 4,000,000 Uzbekistani Soms (UZS) for participating in the activities of an illegal religious group.³⁵ In May 2017, a Tashkent court imposed prison sentences of five to six years on 11 Muslims, accused of meeting in private homes to discuss religious matters and listening to forbidden sermons.³⁶

Prospects for freedom of religion

Uzbekistan's new government has taken tentative yet encouraging steps towards greater democratic openness. It will take time, however, before we can see whether these changes are just window dressing to gain domestic legitimacy and attract foreign investors – indispensable to revive the country's economic fortunes – or a real attempt to change

direction towards a more open democracy, respectful of human rights in general and freedom of religion in particular.

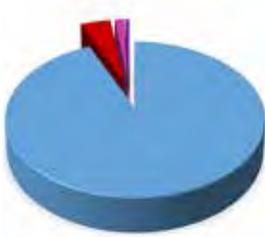
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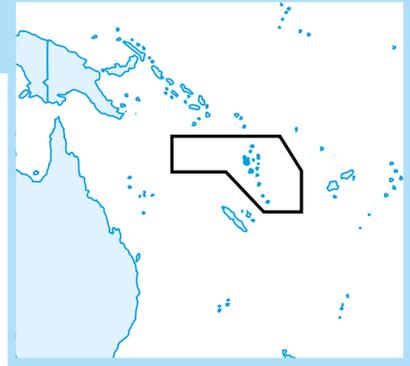
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VANUATU

RELIGION



- Christians: 93,5%
- Ethnoreligionists: 4,5%
- Baha'is: 1,4%
- Others: 0,6%



AREA

12.189km²

POPULATION

270.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Vanuatu is a group of over 80 islands in the South Pacific. Around 65 of these are inhabited.

The preamble to the constitution states that Vanuatu is “founded on traditional Melanesian values, faith in God, and Christian principles”.¹ The constitution recognises that “subject to any restrictions imposed by law on non-citizens, all persons are entitled to [...] freedom of conscience and worship”. This right is “subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and to the legitimate public interest in defence, safety, public order, welfare and health”. A person who believes that this constitutional right has been infringed is entitled to apply to the Supreme Court. This judicial remedy exists “independently of any other possible legal remedy”. The Supreme Court may make any order that it considers appropriate, including an order for damages.

There is no established church. The largest Christian denominations are Presbyterians (27.9 percent), Anglicans (15.1 percent), Seventh Day Adventists (12.5 percent) and Catholics (12.4 percent)². Smaller Christian groups include Assemblies of God, the Church of Christ and the Neil Thomas Ministry. There are also a number of Jews, Baha'is and Muslims. The Jon Frum cargo cult is a politico-religious group which has a small number of adherents on Tanna island.

The Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC) is a non-governmental organisation comprising the Presbyterian Church, the Catholic Church, the Church of Christ, the Apostolic Church and the Church of Melanesia; the Assemblies of God and the Seventh Day Adventists are observer members.³ Events of national significance are celebrated with Christian prayer, led by the member Churches of the VCC.

Under the Education Act of 2014, children may not be refused admission to a school or treated less favourably because of their religion. Secondary state schools provide religious education for an hour a week, which is overseen by the VCC.⁴ The government pays the salaries of teachers at Church schools which were opened before 1980 and makes grants to Church schools.⁵ Under the Education Act of 2014, parents may excuse their children from religious education.

Registration of religions with the government was introduced in 1995 but the law was repealed two years later. The reintroduction of compulsory religious registration at the state level has been considered at various points since then. Religious groups may register as charitable organisations.

The Government of Vanuatu generally respects the religious freedoms set out in the law.

Incidents

In August 2016, the government announced that, for the first time, it would start paying 10 million vatu (£66,000) per annum to the VCC. The Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Vanuatu and New Caledonia stated that the funds would be used to support the Churches in their work in local communities.⁶

On 21st October 2016, the VCC organised a march through Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu. The Chairman of the VCC, Pastor Nafuki, is reported to have said: "It is timely to let other religions know that the Republic of Vanuatu is built on Christian principles and faith in God."⁷ He also said that the constitution should be amended to state: "Vanuatu is a Christian Country that believes in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit." Although the VCC is a member of the Constitutional Review Committee, there is no sign that this constitutional change has made any progress. Pastor Nafuki expressed concern about the presence of Islam in Vanuatu and this is an ongoing issue in the media in Vanuatu.

MPs and ministers did not take part in the march in October 2016. In April 2016, however, the Minister of Internal Affairs had also spoken about the need for the constitution to express more clearly the Christian identity of Vanuatu, in the context of concerns about freedom of worship and "control on religious movements entering the country".⁸

In December 2016, more than 50 churches within the region came together in Vanuatu for a meeting of the Pacific Islands Evangelical and Missionary Network.⁹ In March 2017, the University of South Pacific in Vanuatu announced that, for the first time, religious groups would need to register and obtain approval before being allowed to operate on its campus.¹⁰ In July 2017, the newly sworn-in president, Obed Moses Tallis, pledged to uphold the constitution and to seek to maintain unity within the cultural and religious diversity of the country.¹¹

Prospects for freedom of religion

There is little to indicate imminent changes to the situation of religious freedom in Vanuatu, but the preservation of the Christian identity of the country is a matter of some public concern.

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RELIGION



- Christians: 92,5%
- Agnostics: 4,4%
- Spiritists: 1,1%
- Others: 2%



AREA ³	POPULATION
921.050km ²	31.519.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble to the constitution¹ invokes God's protection with regard to the establishment of a democratic society that upholds rights including freedom from discrimination. Article 59 of the constitution declares that "the state guarantees freedom of cult and religion." The article states that everyone has the "right to profess their religious faith or creed and to manifest their beliefs, in private or in public, through teaching or other practices, provided they are not contrary to morality, good customs and public order." The independence and autonomy of churches and religious denominations are also guaranteed. Parents have the right to educate their children according to their beliefs.

Article 61 upholds freedom of conscience and expression. That said, it states that conscientious objection cannot be invoked to avoid complying with the law.

All forms of discrimination at work are prohibited on the basis of creed, according to article 89.

The state recognises the rights of indigenous peoples under article 119 of the constitution including their right to religious liberty. According to article 121, indigenous people also have the right to maintain and develop their customs and values, including their spirituality and places of worship. These rights are also upheld elsewhere in the country's constitution and legislation.²

The constitution, in article 97, also acknowledges the spirituality and creed of indigenous communities as fundamental components of their worldview. Imposing religious beliefs on indigenous peoples is not allowed, nor is denying their practices and beliefs, according to article 98. Under article 100, the religious education of indigenous children and adolescents is the responsibility of their parents, relatives and members of their people. Article 107 protects indigenous people against political and religious fanaticism.

Other laws³ recognise the right of children and adolescents to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Their parents or guardians have the right and duty to guide them in the exercise of this right. Minors have the right to their own cultural life, to profess and practise their own religion or beliefs, and use their own language, especially those who

belong to ethnic, religious or indigenous minorities. In the field of education,⁴ the state declares itself to be secular, preserving its independence with respect to all religions. Parents are given the right to choose their children's religious education.

In accordance with the fiscal reform of 2014,⁵ tax exemptions for institutions dedicated to religious, artistic, scientific and other activities have been eliminated. Such exemptions are now restricted to charity and social welfare organisations. The Penal Code⁶ categorises types of conduct that threaten freedom of worship. Article 168 concerns punishment of people who attempt to prevent or disturb religious services or ceremonies or intentionally damage items used in worship. Churches are also recognised as legal entities.⁷ Under an agreement with the Holy See, signed in 1964, the Catholic Church is recognised as an international and public legal entity.⁸ In 1994, another agreement was signed with the Holy See regarding the provision of spiritual assistance in the Armed Forces.⁹

Incidents

In July 2016, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Venezuela (CBCV) stated that the country was on the verge of a crisis because of food shortages and lack of medicine and other healthcare. The bishops declared that the rule of law had been weakened and that democracy had broken down. It called on the government to allow medicines into the country, offering its facilities as collection and distribution points.¹⁰

In December 2016, the CBCV president criticised the government's economic policies. Noting that the poor and marginalised were the most disadvantaged, it called for solidarity and peaceful protests.¹¹ The Andrés Bello Catholic University said in April 2017 that it could not remain silent about the violation of human rights, calling on the government to end its repression of peaceful demonstrations.¹²

In May 2017, the CBCV rejected President Nicolás Maduro's proposal to set up a National Constituent Assembly, considering it unnecessary and dangerous for democracy. The bishops called instead for non-violent solutions. Religious leaders were invited to participate in the assembly, with some Church leaders agreeing to take part and others turning down the opportunity. The Confederation of Jewish Associations of Venezuela stated that it had an apolitical position, and called for initiatives to be taken in accordance with the law, ethics and morals.¹³

In August 2016, the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, responded to a request made by the Union of South American Nations (USAN), which includes Argentina, Peru, Guyana, Suriname, Chile, Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia, asking the Pope Francis to facilitate dialogue between the government and the opposition. Jesús Torrealba, secretary general of the Democratic Unity Roundtable (DUR), an alliance opposed to the government, said that he was happy for the Pope to mediate. The Vatican's special envoy to Venezuela, Monsignor Claudio Maria Celli, met with President Maduro in November 2016, stressing that the crisis could only be resolved through dialogue.¹⁴ The following

June, through the Apostolic Nunciature, President Maduro's government requested the mediation of Pope Francis.¹⁵

During the period under review, there have been acts of vandalism, although the motives behind the violence is not entirely clear. In June 2016, the parish priest in Guarenas was hurt during a raid on his church in which some sacred objects were desecrated and others were stolen.¹⁶ In January 2018, the Sagrada Familia Church was robbed and sacrilegious acts were carried out. The aggressors forced open the tabernacle containing the Blessed Sacrament and stole valuable items used in daily services. According to a media report, the attack may have been carried out by so-called santeros or spiritualists, who use these objects in their ceremonies.¹⁷ In the days leading up to Holy Week 2018, a 500-kilogram bell was stolen from a church in the city of Cumaná.¹⁸

In July 2016, five students from the Mérida Catholic Seminary were beaten and stripped of their belongings and clothes as they travelled near the site of a rally which was due to be held shortly. The wife of a political prisoner was thought likely to take part in the protest. Archbishop Baltazar Porras of Mérida denounced the attack, criticising pro-government groups.¹⁹ In August 2017, at dawn one morning, members of State Security burst into the Cristo Rey student residence run by the religious community of the Daughters of Christ the King.²⁰

In November 2017, a group of people entered the Basilica of Our Lady of Consolation, in Táriba, and prevented Mass from taking place. They used the High Altar to count votes.²¹

In September 2017, President Maduro accused some Catholic bishops of being complicit in violence. During his regular Sunday broadcast, the president said: "violent people acted with the blessing of some bandit bishops who do not protect the people, who do not walk like Christ in the streets of the people, who do not suffer, who do not share solidarity with the people, but who are part of a permanent conspiracy and wear the robe to conspire and damage the country."²²

In January 2018, the president also accused Catholic leaders of boycotting the canonisation of Dr José Gregorio Hernández, known as "the saint of the poor".²³

That same month, a group of people representing civil society, protested peacefully in Barquisimeto, rejecting the government's accusations against the representatives of the Catholic Church.²⁴ President Maduro accused two bishops of "hate crimes", asking the Supreme Court of Justice to open an investigation against the prelates.²⁵

In February 2017, representatives of the Confederation of Jewish Associations of Venezuela met with President Maduro. They told him anti-Semitic sentiment was increasing. They also highlighted the disparaging comments made about Israel in the media close to the ruling party and insisted on the need to re-establish relations with the State of Israel.²⁶

In September of 2017, Venezuelan bishops met with Pope Francis during his visit to Colombia. They informed him about the worsening crisis and the threats against priests and nuns.²⁷

In October of 2017, a media opinion piece looked at the situation of religious freedom in Venezuela. It noted that there were no restrictions with respect to attending Mass, visiting a place of worship or taking part in processions. The media piece claimed that “the Church has been systematically denouncing the various forms of violation of religious freedom, sometimes brutal or veiled, in the entire world.” The author added that “Pressures are imposed on parishes and dioceses, judicial proceedings are initiated against representatives of the Church, images of Catholic worship are demolished, profaned or mutilated and threats are threatened in all forms”.²⁸

Christians from different traditions continued their dialogue. Various initiatives took place in October 2017 to mark the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.²⁹ Reports emerged in November 2017 that prisons had been ordered from “high up” to prevent clergy from visiting inmates.³⁰

In November 2017, a news report highlighted the renewed emigration of Venezuelan Jews. More than half of the Jewish community has reportedly left as a result of the country’s financial crisis. The exodus had increased in response to the anti-Semitism present at the highest echelons of government as well as from state agencies including officials working at the tax administration office.³¹ David Bittan, lawyer and former president of the Confederation of Israelite Associations of Venezuela (CAIV), said: “There is no census. It is irresponsible to give a figure, but the perception is that in the last 10 or 12 years more than 50 percent have left.” A former president of CAIV, Abraham Levy said: “The decision to migrate is always personal. Migration can occur in the same proportion among non-Jews, who are affected by insecurity, concerns about their children, political instability and inflation. However, there is no reason why relations with Israel have been broken, and that it is an element of weighty concern”. The report also refers to the actions of Mr Maduro, the president, when he was foreign minister in January 2009. At that time, he expelled the ambassador of Israel in Venezuela and declared him a *persona non grata*.

In March 2018, Father José Palmar became the third priest of Venezuelan origin to go into exile. The other clergymen forced to leave are Pedro Freites, in April 2017, and Alexander Hernández, in January 2018.³²

Several religious organisations have criticised government bureaucrats for not approving their statutes promptly. Some religious groups have received preferential treatment because of their support for government policy.³³

In March 2018, Sam Brownback, the US Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom, referred to the difficulties facing Venezuela’s Catholic bishops who were criticised by President Maduro for talking about the country’s crisis.³⁴

Prospects for freedom of religion

Despite having largest oil reserve in the world, Venezuela is mired in deep political, social and economic crisis, including shortages of food and medicine and crime at record levels. The Catholic Church has persistently spoken out, calling for an end to government

repression and violence. This has led to ongoing confrontation with the authorities who have responded by accusing some bishops of being involved in conspiracies to commit violence. Some bishops have been investigated against by the government. Priests have been threatened, attacked and prevented from performing their pastoral duties such as visiting those who have been detained. A few priests have been forced into exile. Delays and bureaucratic obstacles have been reported in relation to the registration of religious entities not supported by the government.

The government has also been accused of anti-Semitism. Furthermore, in light of attacks and sacrilegious acts against places of worship, there is a perception of less tolerance and respect for the beliefs of others. There are reports indicating that a large number of Jews have left the country seeking a better life and because of rising intolerance directed at their community.

Compared to the previous period, the situation of freedom of religion in Venezuela has ostensibly worsened and the outlook for the coming years is negative.

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VIETNAM

RELIGION



- Buddhists: 49,4%
- Agnostics: 12,3%
- New Religionists: 10,9%
- Ethnoreligionists: 10,7%
- Christians: 8,7%
- Atheists: 6,3%
- Others: 1,7%



AREA	POPULATION
330.967 km ²	94.444.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In common with almost every communist regime, Vietnam's laws and regulations suggest that, on paper at least, there is respect for religious freedom in the country. However, the reality for the Vietnamese people is very different. On 1st January 2018 a "Law on Beliefs and Religion" came into force.¹ Before being voted on by the National Assembly on 16th November 2016, this legal text had gone through a long process. To everyone's surprise, the government Office for Religious Affairs had submitted it to the country's religious communities for comment. In response, on 1st June 2017 the Catholic bishops put forward their "sincere and frank remarks".² The bishops said the proposed law represented a step backwards as compared with the 2004 Ordinance on Beliefs and Religion. The Church expressed regret that the Vietnamese authorities were still wedded to the concept of the so-called "demand-and-grant" system ("xin-cho"). This obliges religious organisations to apply for authorisation from the regime for all activities that they undertake.⁴

In January 2016, the 12th congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party adopted a "Political Report". The document offers insight into the thinking of the highest leaders of the country and of the Vietnamese Communist Party apparatus. A short paragraph is assigned to government policy regarding religious matters:

"We will continue to improve the policy and legislation relevant to beliefs and religion, and to promote the high cultural and moral values of religions. By creating the right conditions, we will ensure that religious organisations will carry out activities that conform to their ideals and regulations, which have been recognised by the state with compliance to the provisions of the law. At the same time, we must work to prevent and fight against activities that use beliefs and religion to undermine and sabotage the block of national unity and fight against religious activities which are in violation with the provisions of the law."

This extract shows how the Vietnamese Communist Party has abandoned strict Marxist-Leninist doctrine on religious matters. Since 1990, religion has no longer been seen as destined to decline or wither away, but a positive part of traditional culture. That said, religion is seen as a double-edged sword capable of contributing to society on the one hand or, on the other, a source of unrest, undermining national unity.

Only within a military review do we find a more detailed article concerning religion. Run in the *Journal of National Defence*,⁵ the February 2016 article is titled: “Religions in Vietnam and their mission: to build and defend the homeland”. The article begins by assessing the impact of the Vietnamese religious world on the country’s defence policy strategy. It provides statistics that do not correspond with the official figures claimed by the religions in question.⁶ According to the author of the article, the smooth functioning of these diverse religious communities and their integration within society are thanks to the Vietnamese Communist Party’s good management.

The article gives the impression that the situation for religions is ideal. However, there is no denying that the authorities continue to monitor very closely the activities of religions within Vietnam. On 11th September 2017, one of the highest officials of Public Security, Vu Chiên Thang, was appointed Director for the Government Office of Religious Affairs, the administrative entity responsible for managing the activities and the organisation of religions within the country.⁷ His predecessor, Lieutenant General Pham Dung, was also a senior official in Public Security, which supervises religious affairs closely. The Catholic bishops of Vietnam believe that Public Security has a fundamentally hostile attitude towards religious organisations, which are considered, in the bishops’ words, “opposition forces”.⁸

The “Law on Beliefs and Religion” incorporates articles related to the religious needs of persons in detention, the religious needs of foreigners and the recognition of the status of “non-commercial legal entities” to religious organisations. The Conference of Catholic Bishops of Vietnam stated in August 2016 that “previously, the term ‘legal entity’ [had] been used in different ways for the recognition of religious organisations” and proposed to indicate “clearly” the status of “non-commercial legal entity with compliance to the legal provisions 91/2015/QH13 of the Civil Code”⁹. This measure could prove significant in a country with frequent land disputes between the civil authorities and religious organisations.

The final piece of legislation, however, – the one voted on by the Parliament – did not retain much legislation that was included within bills circulated in recent years, particularly that relating to activities conducted by religious organisations in the fields of education and health. This issue is particularly sensitive since it has been a constant concern of the Catholic Church and other religions since the unification of the country in 1975. In August 2016, the Bishops’ Conference interpreted the bill as “an authorisation” granted to religious organisations to act within the fields of health and education, “at all levels: kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and universities”.¹⁰ The wording of the legislation in the version of the bill that was passed by Parliament was described as vague the country’s Catholic bishops. Article 55 states: “Religious organisations may participate in educational, training, health, social assistance, charity and humanitarian activities, in accordance with the provisions of the law in force.” Details of how to “participate” are lacking; it is unclear whether religious organisations will be able to open, host and manage educational institutions, health centres etc.

Incidents

Although the Catholic Church has still not gained back control of the many schools it ran (before 1954 in the north and 1975 in the south), its leaders were recently granted permission to open two centres in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). The National University Institute opened on 6th August 2015 and the Catholic Institute of Vietnam (CIV) opened in September 2016. In September 2017, the CIV had 70 students, all Vietnamese.¹¹ Stating that Vietnam had two Catholic universities before 1975 (in Dalat and Saigon), Archbishop Joseph Nguyễn Chi Linh of Huế, the President of the country's Catholic Bishops' Conference, argued that the opening of the CIV is not "new" but "a restoration" of what had been confiscated by the authorities of the day.¹²

On 29th August 2017, Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hanh, aged 91, was allowed back to Vietnam,¹³ the third time that he had returned to his country. He first left Vietnam in 1966 and did so again after the 2008 expulsion of 400 religious and novices from the group he founded in Bat Nha.¹⁴ It is not clear if he will be able to re-establish his monastic community in Vietnam.

In spite of this, government has not altered its habits of surveillance and coercion of religious communities. This includes the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, which is independent of the Buddhism recognised by the Vietnamese authorities. The Church's Patriarch, Thich Quang Do, is still under house arrest in his pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City. Although the 90-year-old is authorised by the regime to leave the Thanh Minh Monastery on a quarterly basis for a medical examination, his freedom of movement is severely restricted, despite the government's assertions to the contrary.¹⁵

Meanwhile, there is no sign of a decrease in land disputes involving the police and religious organisations. One example concerns the Benedictine Monastery of Thien An ("Heavenly Peace"), near Hue. Since the late 1990s, the Vietnamese authorities have been seeking to requisition part of the monastery's land in order to develop a recreational park. On 28th June 2017, 150 people entered the monastery to demolish a cross. When the monks tried to intervene, they were assaulted and one of them was seriously injured.¹⁶ The cross in question, erected in 2014, had already been torn down in 2015 and 2016. As quoted by Radio Free Asia, one witness said the attackers included local police officers dressed in civilian clothes.¹⁷

Another recurring source of tension is the involvement of religious organisations in social affairs. The authorities invariably intervene when they decide the social action in question threatens the government or the Communist Party. In April 2016, toxic discharges from Formosa Plastics steel mill entered the China Sea, causing serious pollution. Local priests supported the people affected when they claimed compensation for the damage caused. Clergy backed efforts to find out who should be held responsible. The official press – the only one available in Vietnam – and audio-visual media questioned the priests' involvement. In spring 2017, the official media accused two Catholic priests, Fathers Dang Huu Nam and Nguyễn Đình Thúc, of carrying out "anti-Party" activities.¹⁸

The state makes every effort to maintain public order, even if it involves infringing basic human rights, including religious freedom. This leads to severe restrictions on evangelisation. Door-to-door missions and distribution of leaflets in public areas can prompt police intervention. Evangelisation work among the ethnic minorities of the High Plains is particularly problematic. When Protestant Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh and his wife, Tran Thi Hong, ministered in the provinces of Kontum and Gia Lai, they were arrested in 2011 on charges of “undermining national solidarity”. The pastor was sentenced to 11 years in prison. For health reasons, he was released earlier than scheduled on 28th July 2017 on the proviso that he would leave the country.¹⁹ He and his family now live in the United States.

The authorities have been violent towards ethnic minorities in the High Plains who convert to Christianity. According to the Vietnamese Committee for Human Rights, on 1st March 2018 unknown assailants beat up 24 Hmongs who had recently converted to Christianity. They had previously been threatened with expulsion from their villages if they did not renounce their new faith. The authorities object to converts to Christian denominations which lack government registration.²⁰

Prospects for freedom of religion

It is too early to assess the impact of the new “Law on Beliefs and Religion” which came into force on 1st January 2018. Continuing harassment of religious organisations and attacks on clergy and faithful do not suggest the government will improve its approach to religious freedom.

Remarks by Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, the former “non-resident papal representative to Vietnam”, could be seen as indicative of the country’s situation with regard to religious freedom.²¹ Speaking at festivities held at the Marian Shrine of La Vang in central Vietnam, the archbishop said many people around the world wanted greater respect for religious freedom in the country.²² He added that the Catholic Church should be considered a source of spiritual well-being rather than an obstacle to the state.

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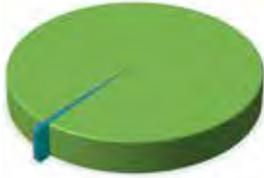
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YEMEN

RELIGION



- Muslims: 99,1%
- Hindus: 0,6%
- Christians: 0,1%
- Agnostics: 0,1%
- Others: 0,1%



AREA	POPULATION
527.968km ²	27.478.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article one of the constitution of 19941 declares the country to be an independent Arab state and article two names Islam as the state religion. Article three states that “Islamic Shari'a is the source of all legislation”. Neither the constitution nor other laws protect freedom of religion. That said, freedom of thought is protected in article 42 “within the limits of the law” and the constitution declares that the state adheres to international human rights law. However, proselytism is forbidden as well as conversion from Islam to another religion. Mockery of religion is also prohibited.² The building of mosques and other places of worship requires approval. Non-Muslim clerics are permitted to wear liturgical dress, and, officially at least, non-Muslim services and liturgies are allowed. Islamic religious education is required for state-run schools, but not for private educational institutes.³ Other forms of religious education are not provided in public schools. The transitional government has eased certain restrictions on various religious practices and on religious speech, including lifting a ban on public commemorations of the Shia holy days of Ashura and Ghadir. Public commemoration of Shia holy days have occasionally resulted in clashes with Sunni groups.⁴

In recent years, Shias, Sunnis, jihadists and tribal fighters have frequently engaged in conflict, leaving the poorest country in the Middle East in a state of permanent civil war.

Since the unification of North Yemen and South Yemen in 1990, three parliamentary elections have taken place, the last in 2003.⁵ Planned elections in 2009 were cancelled because of a legal dispute over election reform. Since 1999, the head of state has been elected. President Ali Abdullah Saleh stepped down in 2012. In his place, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, was elected for a two-year transitional period to form a national unity government. Shia Houthi rebels from the former North Yemen, backed by former President Saleh, staged an armed takeover against the government in 2014. Hadi resigned in January 2015 and fled to Aden. Consequently, the rebels took over the capital, Sana'a, and the presidential palace.⁶

In March 2015 a Saudi-led military coalition⁷ intervened in Yemen to stop the rebels. Despite a ceasefire agreement in April 2016, fighting between government troops and

Houthi rebels has continued. The EU has issued travel bans for, and frozen the assets of, Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, the Houthi leader, and Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh, son of the former president, for their roles in undermining Yemen's peace and stability.

The ongoing war between the Saudi-led coalition and Iran-backed Houthis has caused a major humanitarian crisis, including a cholera outbreak that killed 2,100 people and infected almost 900,000 others between June and November 2017.⁸

In December 2017, in a move interpreted as a desire for rapprochement, former President Saleh established contact with the Saudi-led coalition. A few days later, he was killed by the Houthis.⁹

Minority religious groups such as Baha'is, Christians, Hindus and Jews have reported increasing levels of harassment, especially in Houthi-controlled areas. Houthis have arrested numerous Baha'is, raided their homes and religious centres, but they have also intimidated Christians and Sunni imams, and promoted anti-Semitism. Local communities across the country have also engaged in anti-Semitic activity including printing anti-Semitic material, trying to coerce Jews into converting to Islam, and closing off roads to Jewish communities. Additionally, Ismaili Muslims also continue to face discrimination.¹⁰

The internationally recognised government-in-exile was weakened by the Houthi takeover and has lacked the capacity to enforce laws against human rights abuses. According to the US State Department's 2017 Human Rights report, this has resulted in a number of human rights abuses such as arbitrary killings, disappearances, kidnappings, and other acts of violence committed by various groups.¹¹ The report also lists infringements of citizens' privacy rights and limits on freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, religion and movement.

Incidents

In October 2016, Heiner Bielefeldt, then United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, called on Yemeni authorities to put an end to the systematic harassment of the country's Baha'i population, including arbitrary arrests and detentions. He also demanded the release of detained Baha'i leaders. The Special Rapporteur stated: "No one should be persecuted based on their (sic) religion or belief and neither should they (sic) be targeted when belonging to religious minorities. [...] Random arrests, detentions, raids of [Baha'is] homes and offices as well as confiscation of electronic devices and significant sum of money are simply unacceptable."¹²

Mr Bielefeldt also asked for the release of all detained Baha'is arrested because of their religion. This followed the detention of some 60 people, Baha'is and non-Baha'is, who had met at the Jud Organisation building in Sana'a for a moral and educational conference for youth. Eventually, most of those taken into custody were released.¹³

On 27th November 2016, the authorities released two of the Baha'is still held.¹⁴ One of the detainees, Hamed Kamal Muhammad bin Haydara, remains in custody. Detained since December 2013, he was sentenced to death in January 2018 for allegedly collaborating

with Israel and forging official documents. Human Rights organisations have called for Haydara's death sentence to be quashed.¹⁵ According to family members, he was accused of being "a destroyer of Islam and religion."¹⁶ Government officials had accused him of proselytising for the Baha'i Faith, spying for Israel, and apostasy. Human Rights Watch reported that one of the judges presiding over the case threatened Haydara's wife with prison because of her Baha'i faith and said that all Baha'is ought to be jailed.¹⁷

Jewish community members reported that declining numbers made it difficult to continue their religious practices. In 2016, 19 Jews left the country for Israel.¹⁸ It is believed that in 2017 Yemen was home to around 50 Jews.¹⁹ According to Israel Radio, 40 of those who did not want to leave the country despite the civil war resided in the Houthi-controlled capital of Sana'a.²⁰ In April 2017, speaking to an Israel Radio reporter, Yemen's Information Minister, Moammer al-Iryani, said that his government was unaware of the fate of Yemen's few dozen remaining Jews. He, furthermore, declared that the Houthis consider the tiny remaining Jewish population as an enemy, and that they were engaged in a campaign of ethnic cleansing that includes ridding Yemen of its Jewish community.²¹

Accused of atheism following some Facebook posts considered "critical of Islam", Omar Mohammad Bataweel was abducted and murdered in April 2016.²² Yemeni Nobel Peace Laureate Tawakkol Karman commented on the killing, blaming "takfiri ideology".²³ She called on the authorities to bring the killers to justice.

In January 2017 Mohammed Atboush, a medical student and author of a book criticising "Qur'anic science", survived an assassination attempt. In his book, *Critique of Scientific Inimitability*, published in February 2016 in Kuwait, he critically examines claims that the Qur'an contains references to modern science.²⁴

In May 2017 UN Special Rapporteur on religious freedom, Ahmad Shahid, warned that "the recent escalation in the persistent pattern of persecution of the Baha'i community in Sana'a mirrors the persecution suffered by the Baha'is living in Iran. [. . .] The harassment against the Baha'is, as religious minorities, seems to persist, if not worsen amounting to religious persecution in Yemen," the UN rapporteur said.²⁵

May 2017 saw the release of Salesian Father Tom Uzhunnalil kidnapped in Yemen in March 2016. Father Uzhunnalil was abducted from the Missionaries of Charity home for the elderly in Aden on 4th March 2016. Unidentified gunmen killed four nuns, two Yemeni female staff members, eight elderly residents and a guard. Father Uzhunnalil had worked in Yemen for 14 years. When Aden's Holy Family Church, where he served, was set on fire in 2015, he moved to the care home.²⁶ On Good Friday 2016, a false rumour circulated that Daesh (ISIS) had crucified the clergyman. Then at Christmas 2016, while still in captivity, he appeared in a video urging the government of India and the Church to ensure his release.²⁷

On 23rd March 2018, a highly symbolic day (i.e. the first Friday of the Islamic month of Rajab commemorating the introduction of Islam to Yemen), Houthi leader Abdel-Malek al-Houthi gave a televised speech. His aim was to rally Yemenis against foreign powers and ideologies. He vehemently vilified and denounced the Baha'i faith, raising concerns

about further persecution of the community. His rhetoric describing the Baha'is as a "satanic movement" that is "waging a war of doctrine"²⁸ against Islam was very similar to statements made by Iran's Supreme Leader. His speech was widely relayed by different media. In the same vein, a prominent Houthi writer and strategist commented on social media that "we will butcher every Baha'i". These messages were also taken up by religious authorities in Sana'a, including the recently Houthi-appointed Mufti of Yemen, Shams al-Din Muhammad Sharaf al-Din, who warned Yemenis against the influence of the Baha'is. Such a message has been repeated in other venues, including national conferences and seminars, and event TV shows where International and domestic humanitarian organisations were accused of spreading Baha'i and Christian ideas.³⁰

Prospects for freedom of religion

The ongoing civil war, and recent worrying developments, have put the cohesion of Yemeni society at greater risk. The intensification of the armed conflict makes dialogue at a national level more and more difficult. Taking advantage of the country's social, political and security instability, radical Islamic groups have turned Yemen into a base for their operations.³¹ The continuous fighting and high tensions remain a cause for concern with regard to human rights and freedom in general, and to religious freedom in particular.

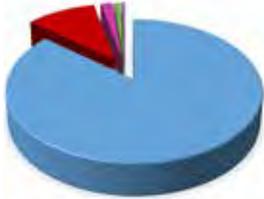
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ZAMBIA

RELIGION



- Christians: 86,1%
- Ethnoreligionists: 10,6%
- Baha'is: 1,8%
- Muslims: 1,1%
- Others: 0,4%



AREA	POPULATION
752.618km ²	16.717.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Article 19 of Zambia's constitution enshrines freedom of religion. This includes the right to change one's religious faith, to express publicly one's faith and to propagate one's religion.¹ An amendment to the preamble introduced in 1996 states that Zambia is a Christian nation that respects its citizens' right to freedom of conscience and worship. Even though this makes the country a Christian confessional state, the constitution guarantees protection for non-Christians, who have the right to follow their religion. There are no other laws in the country that curtail religious freedom.

Religious groups are required to register with the Registrar of Societies. Churches can apply for a certificate of exemption from paying taxes, which is normally applicable to non-profit organisations.

As guaranteed by law, citizens are free to convert to the faith of their choice, Churches are free to evangelise openly, to build places of worship, to carry out pastoral and catechetical work and to raise funds inside the country as well as solicit and receive funds from abroad. No cases have been reported of deliberate employment discrimination in government departments on religious grounds.

Zambia has a small Muslim community, whose members are concentrated primarily in Lusaka and in the Eastern and Copperbelt provinces. Many of them are immigrants from south Asia, Somalia and the Middle East who have acquired Zambian citizenship. A small number of native Zambians are also Muslim. According to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Zambia, the Bahá'í community consists of about 6,000 people, located primarily in the north-west and southern provinces. There are about 10,000 Hindus, mostly of South Asian origin.²

Incidents

During the reporting period, religious tolerance and interfaith cooperation appeared to be generally good. Leaders of ecumenical movements – including the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Christian Council of Zambia and the Evangelical Fellowship of

Zambia – held regular meetings to promote mutual understanding and advocacy on religious issues. Women’s groups such as the Zambian Women Interfaith Network brought together Muslim and Christian women and continued to promote mutual understanding and to work toward common goals, including freedom of worship and the reduction of interdenominational tensions.

In some cases, Muslims complained of apparent verbal attacks by some Christian clergy who referred to the Islamic communities in Zambia as “Satanic”. They singled out Pastor Nevers, founder of the Mumba Victory Ministries, who reportedly said that Muslims have a well-planned strategy to infiltrate Zambia and the rest of southern Africa. The pastor, who is also a political opposition leader, spoke publicly on a number of occasions accusing Muslims of planning the takeover of nations.³ Muslims complained several times of what they see as police harassment.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Zambia has always respected the right to religious freedom, and is likely to continue doing so. The incidents reported appear to be either isolated cases of intolerance or linked to immigration policies.

Endnotes

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- ² Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, (Zambia) Report on International Religious Freedom for 2016, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 8th February 2018).
- ³ ‘Pastor Nevers Mumba says Islam plans to ‘invade’ Zambia’, Lusaka Times, 5th October 2017, <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2017/10/05/pastor-nevers-mumba-says-islam-plans-invade-zambia/> (accessed 8th February 2018).

ZIMBABWE

RELIGION



- Christians: 82,9%
- Ethnoreligionists: 14,7%
- Agnostics: 1%
- Muslims: 0,7%
- Others: 0,7%



AREA	POPULATION
390.759km ²	15.967.000

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In its preamble, Zimbabwe's 2013¹ constitution acknowledges "the supremacy of Almighty God, in whose hands our future lies", and implores for his "guidance". It recognises (chapter 1, article 3) "the nation's diverse cultural, religious and traditional values" and rights. It also guarantees, in Article 60 "the right to freedom of conscience, which includes freedom of thought, opinion, religion or belief; and freedom to practise and propagate and give expression to their thought, opinion, religion or belief, whether in public or in private and whether alone or together with others". The same article also states: "No person may be compelled to take an oath that is contrary to their religion or belief or to take an oath in a manner that is contrary to their religion or belief."

Article 60 goes on to say: "Parents and guardians of minor children have the right to determine, in accordance with their beliefs, the moral and religious upbringing of their children, provided they do not prejudice the rights to which their children are entitled under this constitution, including their rights to education, health, safety and welfare." It also recognises the right of religious communities to "establish institutions where religious instruction may be given, even if the institution receives a subsidy or other financial assistance from the state."

For its part, the 2002 Public Order and Security Act (POSA)² effectively restricts freedom of assembly and association by requiring police permission for public meetings and demonstrations. It gives police the authority to impose arbitrary curfews, and forbids criticism of the president. Although POSA exempts religious activities and events, in practice the authorities have consistently branded as "political" any kind of gatherings – including religious ones – that it interpreted as critical of ZANU-PF, the ruling party. POSA has been invoked at different times to justify police disruption of religious meetings, on the grounds that organisers had not sought permission from the authorities.

There is no law requiring religious groups to register. However, religious groups operating schools or health facilities must register with the appropriate ministry. All religious groups can apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges from the Customs Department. Such requests are generally granted without much complication.

The government observes Easter and Christmas as national holidays.

Incidents

On 25th September 2017, an Evangelical pastor called Evan Mawarine went on trial on charges of attempting to subvert the government, following protests in 2016 against President Robert Mugabe's handling of the economy. The pastor was arrested at Harare airport on 1st February 2017. Through his #ThisFlag movement, he had called on his fellow citizens to stay at home and urged them to speak out against economic problems and government failure to pay workers. He was finally acquitted of all charges on 29th November. The High Court ruling came a week after President Mugabe, who had ruled for nearly 40 years, was ousted by Zimbabwe's military. High Court judge Priscilla Chigumba said in her ruling: "There is no evidence that he [Mawarine] urged a violent removal of government."³ Pastor Mawarine's trial appears to have been motivated by his social activism rather than by his status as a religious leader.

The Catholic Church represents a minority of about 10 percent of the population but has always been seen as highly influential in Zimbabwe. During the 2016-2018 period, it reportedly enjoyed broad freedom in its evangelising activities and social outreach. Some Catholic clergy consulted for this report concur that, although Robert Mugabe's government had, at times, regarded the activities of the Justice and Peace diocesan commissions with suspicion, in general, it did not curtail their programmes and avoided open confrontation⁴ with religious groups critical of the country's political regime. The new authorities who took over the country after Mr Mugabe was ousted have so far maintained the same line with regard to religious tolerance.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Given the absence of serious incidents against religious freedom and the fact that religious groups can freely worship and conduct their charitable activities, it can be safely concluded that there was a reasonable degree of religious freedom in the country.

Endnotes

- ¹ Zimbabwe's Constitution of 2013, [constituteproject.org, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Zimbabwe_2013.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Zimbabwe_2013.pdf) (accessed 6th February 2018).
- ² 'Public Order and Security Act', International Labour Organization, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=85399 (accessed 14th February 2018).
- ³ AFP, 'Zimbabwe acquits pastor of trying to overthrow Mugabe', 29th November 2017, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/Zimbabwe/zimbabwe-acquits-pastor-of-trying-to-overthrow-mugabe-20171129> (accessed 14th February 2018).
- ⁴ Interview on 30th November 2017 with a Catholic priest working in Zimbabwe for over 40 years.

Aid to the Church in Need is a Catholic charity supporting the Church to continue helping others wherever they are persecuted, oppressed or in need – through information, prayer and action. Founded on Christmas Day 1947, ACN became a Pontifical Foundation of the Church in 2011. Every year the charity responds to more than 5,000 requests for aid from bishops and religious superiors in around 140 countries, including: training seminarians, printing Bibles and religious literature – including ACN’s Child’s Bible of which more than 51 million copies have been printed in more than 180 language; supporting priests and religious in difficult circumstances; building and restoring churches and other premises; broadcasting religious programmes; and helping refugees.



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