

SAMOA

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1,133 square miles and a population of 183,200. There are two main islands and seven islets in the group, with the majority of the population residing on the island of Upolu, where the capital Apia is located. The 2006 census revealed the following distribution of major religious groups: Congregational Christian, 33.6 percent; Roman Catholic, 19.4 percent; Methodist, 14.3 percent; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 13.2 percent; Assemblies of God, 6.9 percent; and Seventh-day Adventist, 3.5 percent. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Jehovah's Witnesses, Congregational Church of Jesus, Nazarene, nondenominational Protestant, Baptist, Worship Centre, Peace Chapel, Samoa Evangelism, Elim Church, and Anglican. A comparison of the 2001 and 2006 censuses showed a slight decline in the membership of major or "mainline" denominations and an increase in participation in nontraditional and evangelical groups.

Although there is no official data, it is generally believed that there are also some practicing Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews in the country, primarily in Apia. The country has one of the world's seven Bahai Houses of Worship; there is also a Muslim community that meets in a small mosque.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. The constitution provides for the right to choose, practice, and change the religion of one's choice, and the government observed and enforced these provisions. Legal protections cover discrimination or persecution by private as well as government actors.

The preamble to the constitution describes the country as "an independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and traditions." Although Christianity is favored constitutionally and public ceremonies typically begin with a Christian prayer, there is no official state religion. In practice village chiefs often choose the religious denomination of their extended families.

There are no requirements for the recognition of a religious group or for licenses or registration.

The constitution provides freedom from unwanted religious education in schools and gives each religious group the right to establish its own schools. Church-run pastoral schools in most villages have traditionally provided religious instruction following school hours. However, in January the government began to enforce a 2009 education policy that makes Christian instruction compulsory in both public primary and secondary schools. The policy is in line with a decision by the government stating that Christian beliefs ought to be taught in schools.

At year's end a commission established by the government to make recommendations regarding possible amendments to the constitution concerning religious freedom had completed its collection of public submissions, but the final report had not been publically released and tabled in parliament.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, White Monday (Children's Day), and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

In contrast with the previous reporting period, the Censor Board did not ban any movies due to requests from religious groups.

There were no reports of abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

Traditionally, villages tended to have one primary Christian church. Now many larger villages have multiple churches serving different denominations that coexist peacefully. However, some newer, nontraditional groups faced resistance when attempting to establish a foothold in a given village.

There remained minor tensions between Fa'a Samoa (the Samoan way) and individual religious rights. One of the elements of Fa'a Samoa is the traditional, tightly-knit village community. Each village community has its own religious denomination. The village elders and the community at large are not very receptive of anyone who might attempt to introduce another denomination or religion into the community.

Religious observance was high throughout the country. There was strong societal pressure at the village and local level to participate in church services and other activities and to support church leaders and projects financially. In some denominations, such financial contributions often totaled more than 30 percent of family income.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy also maintained contacts with representatives of the country's various religious communities. The embassy met with a number of religious groups during the reporting period on visa

problems related to their workers traveling to the mainland United States for study, mission work, or other projects.