

BOTSWANA

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government hosted inter-religious dialogues with leaders from Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, Muslim, Baha'i, Hindu, and other religions. The U.S. government also engaged religious groups that provide social services. In conversations with the U.S. government, the government was open to the topic of religious freedom and receptive to the International Religious Freedom Report on the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

Approximately 70 percent of citizens identify themselves as Christians. Anglicans, Methodists, and members of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa make up the majority of Christians. There are also congregations of Lutherans, Roman Catholics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, the Dutch Reformed Church, Mennonites, and other Christian denominations. The Muslim community, primarily of South Asian origin, numbers slightly more than 5,000. There are small numbers of Hindus and Baha'is. Approximately 20 percent of citizens espouse no religion.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution provides for the suspension of religious freedom in the interest of national defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health.

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However, any suspension of religious freedom by the government must be deemed “reasonably justifiable in a democratic society” under the constitution.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register with the government. To register, a group must submit its constitution to the Registrar of Societies section of the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs. There are no legal benefits for registered organizations, although an organization must register before it can conduct business, sign contracts, or open an account at a local bank. Any person who manages, assists in the management of, or holds an official position in an unregistered organization is liable to a fine of up to 1,000 pula (\$154) and up to seven years in prison. Any member of an unregistered society is liable to penalties including fines up to 500 pula (\$77) and up to three years in prison.

Religious education is part of the curriculum in public schools; it emphasizes Christianity but also addresses other religious groups in the country. The constitution provides that every religious community may establish places for religious instruction at the community’s expense. Christian schools are treated the same as non-Christian schools. The constitution prohibits forced religious instruction, forced participation in religious ceremonies, or taking oaths that run counter to an individual’s religious beliefs.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas. Non-Christian businesses often close on their respective holidays and non-Christians often observe their holidays using annual leave.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom, including religious prisoners or detainees.

Although it was common for government meetings to begin with a Christian prayer, members of non-Christian groups also occasionally led prayers during such meetings.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

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Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government hosted inter-religious dialogues with Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, Muslim, Baha'i, and Hindu religious leaders, as well as with leaders of other religious groups. The U.S. government also engaged religious groups that provide social services.