

CHILE

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. The government made efforts to increase engagement with Protestant groups.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Incidents of anti-Semitism included vandalism, verbal slurs, and online harassment.

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious tolerance with the National Office of Religious Affairs and leaders of numerous religious groups, focusing in particular on the value of deepening institutional cooperation. The embassy organized several events promoting religious tolerance, including an iftar (evening meal during Ramadan) and a digital video conference on the experience of Muslim Americans after 9/11.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the most recent census in 2002, 70 percent of the population over the age of 14 identified themselves as Roman Catholic and 15 percent as evangelical. In the census, the term “evangelical” referred to all non-Catholic Christian churches with the exception of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah’s Witnesses, Orthodox churches (Armenian, Greek, Persian, Serbian, and Ukrainian), and Seventh-day Adventists. Approximately 90 percent of those identified as evangelicals are Pentecostal. Anglican, Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Reformed Evangelical, and Wesleyan church members constitute the remaining 10 percent. Baha’is, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, and members of the Unification Church collectively constitute less than 5 percent of the population.

Indigenous persons make up 5 percent of the population. Sixty-five percent of indigenous persons identify themselves as Catholic, 29 percent as Protestant, and 6 percent as “other.” Mapuche communities, constituting 87 percent of indigenous citizens, continue to respect traditional religious leaders (Longkos and Machis),

and anecdotal information indicates a high degree of syncretism in worship and traditional healing practices.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

Church and state are officially separate. The law prohibits religious discrimination. The National Office for Religious Affairs is mandated to work with all religious organizations to provide for the implementation of constitutional provisions for religious freedom.

The law allows any religious group to apply for religious nonprofit status. The Ministry of Justice may not refuse to accept a registration petition, although it may object to the petition within 90 days on the grounds that all legal prerequisites for registration were not satisfied. The petitioner then has 60 days to address objections raised by the ministry or challenge the ministry in court. Once a religious entity is registered, the state cannot dissolve it by decree. The semiautonomous Council for the Defense of the State may initiate a judicial review; however, no organization that registered under the law subsequently has been deregistered. The law allows religious entities to adopt a charter and bylaws suited to a religious organization rather than a private corporation. They may establish affiliates (schools, clubs, and sports organizations) without registering them as separate entities. There are more than 2,000 registered religious groups.

The law prohibits the use of any means of communication to publish or transmit information designed to promote hatred of or hostility towards persons or groups based on religion and other factors and establishes fines for infractions.

Publicly-subsidized schools are required to offer religious education during two teaching hours per week through high school. Parents may decide to have their children excused from religious education. Local school administrators decide how funds are spent on religious instruction. The majority of religious instruction in public schools is Catholic, although the Ministry of Education has approved curricula for 14 other religious groups. Schools must teach the religion requested by the parents. Parents may homeschool their children for religious reasons or enroll them in private schools.

The law grants religious groups the right to have chaplains in public hospitals, prisons, and military units. Regulations for the armed forces and law enforcement agencies allow officially registered religious groups to appoint a chaplain to serve in each branch of the armed forces, in the national uniformed police, and in the national investigative police. Catholic chaplains outnumber Protestant chaplains in all branches of the armed forces, and Protestant leaders continue to advocate for more paid chaplain positions.

Hospital regulations continue specifically to permit Catholic chaplains in hospitals and, if requested by a patient, to provide access to chaplains and lay practitioners of other religions. The prison system, in contrast, has both Catholic and Protestant staff chaplains and a large number of volunteer chaplains.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, the Feast of the Virgin of Carmen, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, the Feast of the Assumption, National Day of Evangelical Churches, All Saints' Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Catholicism was the dominant religion in public schools, prisons, hospitals, and the military. Representatives from the National Office of Religious Affairs held regular roundtable meetings with Protestant leaders to discuss mechanisms to increase Protestant pastoral presence in these institutions.

At a June 3 ceremony at the presidential palace, the minister of the Secretariat General of the Presidency presented an official notice to the Ministries of Defense, Education, Justice, and Health instructing each ministry to comply with previously established legal norms requiring access to pastoral and educational services for all religious groups.

The celebration of Catholic Mass frequently marks official and public events. If the event is of a military nature, all members of participating units may be obliged to attend. Government officials attended Catholic events and also major Protestant and Jewish ceremonies.

Enforcement of the requirement that public schools teach courses of the religion requested by parents was sometimes lax. To boost compliance, members of the

National Office of Religious Affairs traveled to 13 of 15 regions and met with educators and religious leaders to stress that non-Catholic religion classes must be offered when requested. The National Office of Religious Affairs also provided assistance to municipal offices of religious affairs to develop community-supported curricula in public schools. However, a lack of non-Catholic religion teachers and funding constraints sometimes hindered implementation.

In the first case of its kind to be tried in the country, in May an appellate court ruled in favor of a bank that refused service to a woman wearing a hijab. According to court documents, the court deemed the arguments concerning which of the woman's constitutional rights were violated to be imprecise.

The government criticized incidents of religious intolerance that received significant press coverage, including public anti-Semitic comments made by government officials.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Anti-Semitic incidents occurred throughout the year, including acts of vandalism, verbal slurs, online harassment, and bomb threats. For example, large numbers of street protests were accompanied by increased levels of graffiti (including swastikas and other manifestations of anti-Semitism) in large cities such as Santiago and Valparaiso.

The interior minister, who is Jewish, was the target of several anti-Semitic remarks. The president of the College of Professors accused him of using "Zionist methods of apartheid" and "having some upbringing in some school of Israel." An elected congressional representative commented via social media that he was a "Jew who acts like a Nazi."

On December 3, an Israeli tourist was arrested after being accused of starting a fire that burned a significant portion of Torres del Paine National Park. A wave of anti-Semitic comments, including two by government officials, subsequently surfaced on social media sites.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives maintained contact with principal religious leaders and the National Office of Religious Affairs. These discussions focused on the value of deepening institutional cooperation and the importance of passing antidiscrimination legislation, a theme many Jewish leaders emphasized.

In September the embassy hosted a digital video conference entitled “Inter-Religious and Civic Dialogue: The Experience of Muslim-Americans After September 11.” Among the 30 attendees were representatives from the Muslim, Jewish, Protestant, and Baha’i communities, along with government officials, academics, and students.

On August 16, the U.S. deputy chief of mission hosted an iftar attended by approximately 40 leaders from numerous religious groups. The dinner emphasized the role of tolerance and honored the Muslim tradition of iftar in a religiously diverse setting.