

BOLIVIA

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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 424,164 square miles and a population of 10 million. According to the 2001 census conducted by the National Statistical Institute, 78 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 16 percent is Protestant or evangelical, 3 percent follow other religions of Christian origin, 2.5 percent practice no religion, and less than 0.2 percent claim affiliation with non-Christian faiths, including Islam (Shia and Sunni), The Bahai Faith, Judaism, Buddhism, and Shinto. Of those who habitually practice their religion, 56.5 percent are Catholic, 36.5 percent are Protestant or evangelical, and 7 percent belong to other Christian groups. In urban areas, 80 percent of the population is Catholic, while 14 percent is Protestant or evangelical. In rural areas, 74 percent of the population is Catholic, while 20.5 percent is Protestant or evangelical.

The indigenous population (estimated at 55 percent) is higher in rural areas, where the formal Catholic Church tends to be weaker due to a lack of resources and to indigenous cultural resistance to church efforts to replace traditional attitudes with more-orthodox Catholic practices and beliefs. For many individuals, identification with Catholicism for centuries has coexisted with attachment to traditional beliefs and rituals, with a focus on the Pachamama or Mother Earth figure, and on Ekeko, a traditional indigenous god of luck, harvests, and general abundance, whose festival is celebrated widely on January 24.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) estimates membership in the Mormon Church at approximately 185,000. Mormons are present throughout the country with roughly equal presence in the major cities of La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz. There are an estimated 1,000 Muslims, both converts and immigrants. Muslims have cultural centers that also serve as mosques in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz, predominantly for Sunni Muslims. Shia Muslims have a small but growing community in La Paz. The approximately 650-member Jewish community is spread throughout the country and has synagogues in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz. Korean immigrants have their own Christian church in La Paz and founded a university with evangelical and Presbyterian ties in Santa Cruz. The Mennonite community consists of nearly 30 colonies, mostly located in Santa Cruz.

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. According to article 4 of the constitution promulgated in 2009, "The state respects and guarantees religious liberty and spiritual beliefs, in accordance with its worldview (cosmovisiones). The state is independent from religion."

Written agreements between the government and the Catholic Church, including a five-year framework agreement signed in 2009, formalized the Catholic Church's extensive work in the areas of education, health, and social welfare. Due to the separation between church and state enunciated in the 2009 constitution, the government halted its former practice of providing the Catholic Church with limited financial support, although it promised to support several of the church's social welfare projects. The Catholic Church exercised a limited degree of political influence through sermons and through the Catholic Bishops' Conference, a recent source of some tension with the government.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including non-Catholic religious organizations and missionary groups, seeking to acquire legal representation must register with the governor's office of their respective departments (state

equivalents) to receive authorization. Nonprofit religious organizations and missionary groups must then register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship's Office of the Director of Religion to receive recognition as religious associations; however, the director's office has no enforcement mechanism. More than 300 religious organizations registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship's Unit of Religion and Nongovernmental Organizations during the year. Registered religious organizations receive tax exemptions. A religious organization that fails to submit an annual report to the Office of the Director of Religion for two consecutive years is removed from the registry, but the organization is notified prior to removal.

There were no reports that the government restricted gatherings of nonregistered religious groups, but registration is essential to obtain tax, customs, and other legal benefits. The ministry may not deny legal recognition to any organization based on its articles of faith and does not charge a fee for registration; however, the procedure typically requires legal assistance and may be time-consuming. Some groups chose to forego official registration and operated informally. Religious groups receiving funds from abroad may enter into a framework agreement with the government for three years that permits them to enjoy judicial standing similar to that of other NGOs and have tax-free status.

Some public schools provide Catholic religious instruction. By law it is optional, and curriculum materials describe it as such. Students face some peer pressure to participate, although this pressure has declined in recent years. Non-Catholic religious instruction is not available in public schools for students of other religious groups.

The government was represented at interfaith meetings and worked with Catholic, Protestant, and Mormon organizations on social, health, and educational programs.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Corpus Christi, All Souls' 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.

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. Leaders from Muslim, Jewish, Bahai, Catholic, and indigenous communities continued to hold interfaith meetings throughout the reporting period. Although some friction existed between supporters of indigenous religious groups and the Catholic Church, the church did not perceive this as discrimination.

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. chargé d'affaires and other embassy officials met regularly with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, principal religious leaders, and the papal nuncio.