

GABON

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 discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy engaged regularly with key religious leaders of a variety of affiliations.

Section I. Religious Demography

Approximately 70 percent of the population, including noncitizens, is Christian; 10 to 15 percent is Muslim (of whom 80 to 90 percent are foreigners); 10 percent practices animism exclusively; and 5 percent of the population is not religious. Many persons practice a syncretistic religious belief that combines elements of Christianity, traditional mystical religious beliefs, Voodoo, or animism.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The Ministry of Interior maintains an official registry of religious groups. However, it did not grant registration to some small, unaffiliated groups, and they experienced no restriction on their practices and worship. The government does not require religious groups to register but recommends that they do so to receive full constitutional protection. Religious groups are exempt from land use and construction permit fees. Registered religious groups are not automatically tax-exempt and must complete an additional formal registration process to prove that they are nonprofit organizations to be exempt from tax requirements. If recognized

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as a religious organization but not eligible for nonprofit status, a religious group is required to pay local taxes and customs duties on imports.

Muslim, Protestant, and Roman Catholic groups operated primary and secondary schools. These schools must register with the Ministry of Education, which is charged with ensuring that they meet the same standards required for public schools.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: All Saints' Day, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, Christmas, Easter Sunday and Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Kebir (Eid al-Adha), and Pentecost.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

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.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy maintained contact with the minister of human rights, minister of interior, and various nongovernmental organizations to discuss the general state of religious freedom in the country. The embassy enjoyed a strong working relationship with the Muslim community and engaged in specific outreach efforts, including targeted outreach and book donations.