

ECUADOR

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 some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, in particular some instances of discrimination regarding the Muslim community.

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom with leaders of a broad spectrum of religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to PROLADES (the Latin American Socio-Religious Studies Program which categorizes religious groups in Latin American and the Caribbean), 85 percent of citizens are Roman Catholic, 12 percent are Protestant, 1 percent are other religions, and the remaining 2 percent include atheists, agnostics, and those who did not respond. Some groups follow a syncretic form of Catholicism that combines indigenous beliefs with orthodox Catholic doctrine.

Included in the 12 percent of citizens who are Protestants are Southern Baptists, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostals. Pentecostals particularly draw their membership from indigenous people in the highland provinces. Hundreds of evangelical churches exist, many of which are not affiliated with a particular denomination. These groups include the Gospel Missionary Union, now called Avant Ministries, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Hoy Cristo Jesus Bendice (Today Jesus Christ Blesses). There are also practitioners of Santeria, primarily Cubans.

Other registered religious groups, including Anglicans, Baha'is, Buddhists, Episcopalians, Jews, Lutherans, Muslims, members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Presbyterians, members of the Unification Church, and followers of Inti (the traditional Inca sun god), have small numbers of members.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution grants all citizens and foreigners the right to practice publicly and freely the religion of their choice and prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The law requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of Interior. To register, a religious organization must possess a charter, have nonprofit status, include in its application all names used by the group to ensure that names of previously registered groups are not used without their permission, and provide signatures of at least 15 members, typically leaders of the organization. In addition, a presidential decree requires all nongovernmental organizations, including churches and other religious groups, to register with the government. All nonprofit organizations, including more than 2,200 registered religious groups, are required to report on the expenditure of any government funding received.

Under the law, public schools are prohibited from providing religious instruction. Private schools may provide religious instruction. Private schools may be partially or entirely government-funded.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Carnival, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

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.

Muslim leaders reported that members of their community occasionally experienced discrimination when applying for work or housing, or among children at school. The Muslim community combated this prejudice with informational pamphlets explaining Islamic practices and traditions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom with leaders representing a broad spectrum of religious groups. U.S. embassy officials discussed the status of religious freedom and respect for religious diversity with Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and evangelical leaders, and met with religiously-affiliated nongovernmental organizations. The U.S. embassy hosted an event on women's issues that included a discussion of religious tolerance.