

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

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

The U.S. embassy discussed religious freedom with government officials as well as religious and cultural groups to promote tolerance and religious diversity. In August, the ambassador met with Muslim leaders, visited a local mosque, and hosted an iftar.

Section I. Religious Demography

A U.S. government source estimates the population at 10.1 million. The population is approximately 40 percent "practicing" Roman Catholic, 29 percent "nonpracticing" Roman Catholic, 18 percent evangelical Protestant, including Assemblies of God, Church of God, Baptists, and Pentecostals, and 11 percent without religious affiliation, according to a 2006 Gallup survey. There are also small numbers of Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). According to a 2007 Dominican Confederation of Evangelical Unity estimate, evangelicals represent 16 to 20 percent of the population.

Most of the approximately 350 Jews live in Santo Domingo, where there are two synagogues and one rabbi. There is also a small Jewish community and a synagogue in Sosua. There are approximately 800 Muslims, including foreign students. There are a small number of Buddhists and Hindus. Some Catholics combine Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean beliefs (santeria), witchcraft (brujeria), or voodoo (vodou), but they usually conceal such practices.

Most Haitian immigrants are Catholic. An unknown number practice voodoo, but typically conceal the practice.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution extends to diverse religious groups the right to celebrate religious marriages and provides all civil rights in accord with the law.

The constitution specifies that there is no established church and provides for freedom of religion and belief. However, a concordat with the Vatican designates Catholicism as the official religion and extends special privileges to the Catholic Church not granted to other religious groups. These include the legal recognition of church law, use of public funds to underwrite some church expenses, and complete exclusion from customs duties.

Religious groups must register with the government. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church may request exclusion from customs duties from the office of the presidency.

The law requires Bible reading in public schools, but the government did not enforce the law strictly. Private schools are exempt from this requirement.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Our Lady of Altagracia Day, Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Our Lady of Mercedes Day, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

The process of granting religious groups other than the Catholic Church exclusion from customs duties was sometimes lengthy. However, the government denied no requests for customs duty exclusion during the year.

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

U.S. embassy officers discussed religious freedom with the government as well as with religious and cultural groups to underscore the linkage between religious freedom and promoting democracy and human rights. In August the ambassador visited Gazcue Mosque, an important religious symbol to the Muslim community, to celebrate the Muslim holiday of Ramadan. The ambassador hosted an iftar during Ramadan with leaders of the Muslim community.