



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **41.6%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **40.5%**
- Muslims : **16.0%**
- Agnostics : **1.6%**
- Others : **0.3%**

4,615,000

111,369 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The separation of Church and state and religious freedom is enshrined in the Liberian constitution!^[1]

Liberian law does not require religious communities to gain state registration!^[2] However, registration is sought in most cases as these organisations receive tax exemptions and a waiver on import duties,

Private schools, many of which are run by Church or Islamic organisations, receive state financial support!^[3]

Unlike other countries in the region, Islam is not dominant in Liberia, which was founded for the repatriation of former U.S. slaves. A significant proportion of the population are Christian!^[4] but significantly people of one religion often follow the rites and customs of other faiths. Religious tolerance is broadly upheld by society at large. There are two major religious umbrella organisations: the (Protestant) Liberian Council of Churches and the National Muslim Council of Liberia!^[5]

During the reporting period, Liberia (along with Guinea and Sierra Leone) has been recovering from a severe Ebola outbreak, which, by the time it was declared officially over in May 2015, had claimed more than 4,800 lives!^[6] The epidemic's impact was huge; Liberia returned to recession, the inadequate health care system deteriorated further, poverty and hunger remained acute. All these problems were made worse by an infrastructure still reeling from the civil war (1989-2003).^[7]

The Ebola epidemic impacted religious practice and culture. The rapid spread of the virus and the extreme risk of infection prevented many people from burying their dead according to Christian or Muslim custom!^[8]

Incidents

There were no constitutional amendments or serious incidents relating to religious freedom in Liberia during the period under review.

An initiative to enshrine in the constitution the notion that Liberia is a “Christian nation” sparked debate. Critics included former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as well as the Catholic Church, Baptists, Lutherans, and Muslim groups. However, some Protestant pastors spoke out in favour of the proposal.^[9]

The status of Sunday as a holiday repeatedly leads to disputes between Christians and Muslims, with the latter claiming this unfairly privileges Christians.^[10]

Prospects for freedom of religion

The effects of the election of the former national and world football player George Weah as the country’s president remain to be seen. Weah is now a Methodist. He was born into a Christian family but he converted to Islam before returning to Christianity.^[11] He is recognised for working hard; he began life in the slums and went on to become a sports star and earn a university degree. Weah has called on religious groups to promote peaceful coexistence^[12]

Endnotes / Sources

[1] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, ‘Liberia’, International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 2nd April 2018).

[2] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, op. cit.

[3] 12 Ibid.

[4] For the share of different religious communities in the total population, see Grim, Brian et al. (eds): Year-book of International Religious Demography 2017, Brill: Leiden/Boston, 2017; Munzinger Länder: Liberia’, Munzinger Archiv 2018, <https://www.munzinger.de/search/start.jsp>, (accessed 12th April 2018).

[5] Munzinger Archiv 2018, op. cit.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Michael Gregory, ‘Ein Stürmer als Präsident’, Die Tagespost, 24th January 2018, <https://www.die-tage-post.de/politik/pl/Ein-Stuermer-als-Praesident;art315,185164>, (accessed 12th February 2018); Vincent Huguéux, ‘George Weah: “Au Liberia, personne ne peut me battre!”’, L’Express, 10th October 2017, https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/afrique/george-weah-au-liberia-personne-ne-peux-me-battre_1949547.html, (accessed 14th April 2018).

[12] 'You quizzed George Weah', BBC Sports Talk Forum, 18th September 2001,
http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/sports_talk/forum/1550731.stm, (accessed 2nd April 2018).