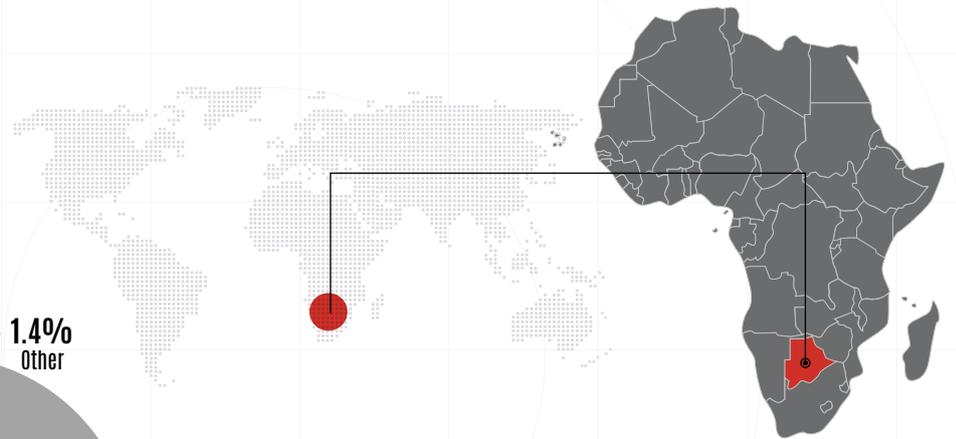
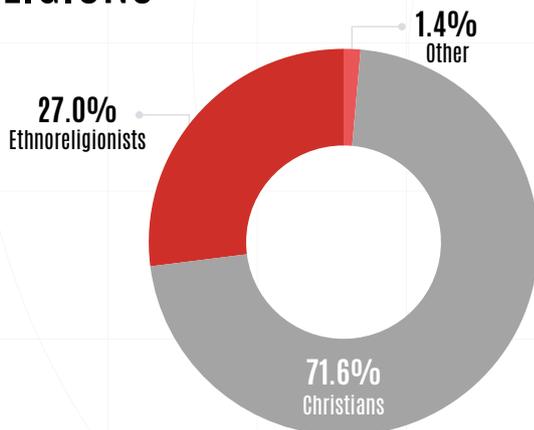




BOTSWANA

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

The Constitution of the Republic of Botswana¹ of 1966, amended in 1994 and 1997, guarantees (Article 11, Section 1) “freedom of conscience”, which includes “freedom of thought and of religion, freedom to change his or her religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate his or her religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.” In Section 2, it continues: “Every religious community shall be entitled, at its own expense, to establish and maintain places of education and to manage any place of education which it wholly maintains; and no such community shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for persons of that community in the course of any education provided at any place of education which it wholly maintains or in the course of any education which it otherwise provides.” It finally states (Section 3) that, “Except with his or her own consent (or, if he or she is a minor, the consent of his or her guardian) no person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take

part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if that instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his or her own.”

Religious groups must register with the Registrar of Societies at the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, but the process is usually straightforward and only takes a few months.² Registration has certain legal benefits since unregistered religious groups cannot sign contracts, conduct business or open bank accounts. The membership threshold for new religious groups is 150.³

The following religious feasts are national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas Day.⁴ Although the country only recognises Christian holidays, members of other religious groups are allowed to observe their feast days without government interference.⁵

Botswana is predominantly Christian, but it is home to important religious minorities such as Baha'is, Muslims (mostly of South Asian origin) and Hindus, usually foreign migrant workers. A growing number of people who are nominally Christian appear to adhere to no religious beliefs. The government acknowledges religious pluralism and encourages interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

During the period covered by this report, there were no incidents of an interreligious nature, nor acts of intolerance, discrimination or persecution against any religious group. In July 2018, Botswanan President Mokgweetsi Masisi announced that missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ would be granted year-long visas; previously, they only received short-term visas.⁶

The Enlightened Christian Gathering Church's application was withdrawn on 10th January 2018 after the government said the Church had failed to respond to an official letter asking leaders to explain why they solicit "miracle money", which is regarded as illegal by the state authorities. The Church is in the process of re-registration.⁷ Pastor Bushiri, a renowned religious leader in Southern Africa, famous for his preaching style and alleged miracles, is facing charges of fraud and money laundering. His case was transferred to the Gauteng High Court in Pretoria in November 2019 for trial.⁸

PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

As one of the rare African countries with a well-established democracy, Botswana has a strong tradition of rule of law and respect for basic human rights, including religious freedom. However, its Gini Coefficient is 53.3, which means that it is one of the world's most unequal societies.⁹

Despite this, respect for religious minorities and peaceful relations between faith groups continues. The case of the Enlightened Christian Gathering Church appears to be primarily a law enforcement issue involving fraud. Based on its track record, the country is likely to continue along a path of stability.

The African Council for Religious Leaders has proposed to set up an ad hoc committee, the Interreligious Council Botswana¹⁰, but it is not yet operational. Interfaith press releases and statements are common since the Christian churches are united and collaborative.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the Catholic Church, especially the Sisters of Calvary,¹¹ have been working to provide masks to the population. There were no indications of tensions between religious communities during the lockdown.

SOURCES / ENDNOTES

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