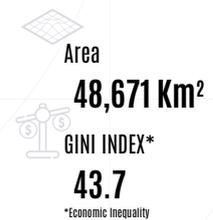
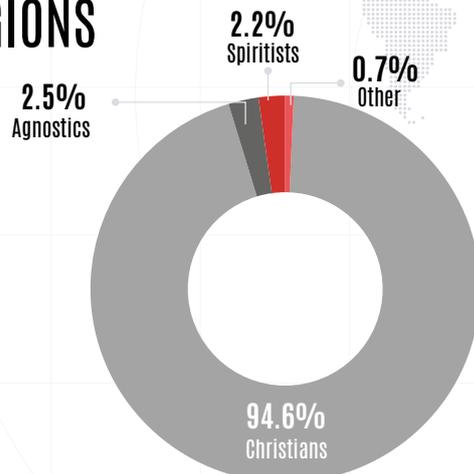




DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

The Preamble of the Constitution¹ invokes God. The national Coat of Arms includes a Bible and a cross in the centre (Article 32). The national motto is “God, Country and Liberty” (Article 34).

Article 39 stipulates that all people are born free and equal, that they are entitled to the same protection and treatment and enjoy the same rights, freedoms and opportunities, without discrimination based on, among other things, gender, colour, religion or political opinion.

Article 45 upholds freedom of conscience and worship, subject to public order.

Religious marriages have - according to Article 55 (4) - civil effects in the terms established by law, without prejudice to the provisions of international treaties.

Although the state is not confessional under the Constitution, a concordat with the Holy See has been in place since 1954. It states that the “Catholic religion [. . .] is the religion of the Dominican Republic and shall enjoy the rights and prerogatives due to it” (Article 1).²

The state recognises the international legal personality

of the Holy See and of all its religious institutions and associations. It guarantees the Catholic Church the free and full exercise of its spiritual power and jurisdiction and its free and public acts of worship (Article 3, 1).

The government recognises the civil quality of marriages celebrated in accordance with canon law (Article 15, 1). It guarantees religious assistance to the members of the Armed forces (Article 17) and facilitates religious assistance in schools, hospitals and prisons (Article 19). The state guarantees the teaching of the Catholic religion in public schools, except for students whose parents ask for an exemption (Article 22, 2).

The Constitution stipulates that to be recognised by the state and obtain legal recognition, non-Catholic religious organisations must fulfil certain requirements and follow the procedures indicated by the law. Once these requirements have been met, they can enjoy tax-exempt status.³

The General Education Law upholds freedom of education, while private schools may offer religious and/or moral instruction in accordance with their own pedagogical ideas (Article 24).⁴

Law No. 198-11 regulates the terms and conditions un-

der which the civil effects of religious marriages celebrated by non-Catholic Churches are recognised.⁵

A biblical studies law mandates the Bible be read in public schools at the beginning of each day.⁶

In addition to a 2016 bill on religious freedom, another draft law was presented in March 2019; it includes, among other things, the obligation of religious entities and Churches to register, a ban on any attempt to undermine public order, respect for other faiths, the right not to be subjected to discrimination because of one's religious beliefs, the right to observe the feast days and day of rest of one's religion, and the right of religious entities to obtain state grants.⁷ In May 2018, the relevant parliamentary committee delivered a favourable report to a plenary session of the Chamber of Deputies, merging the two projects with some additional recommendations.⁸

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

In early 2018, according to a survey by Latinobarómetro, the number of Catholics in the country has declined.⁹ In 2013, more than 60 percent of the population said they belonged to this religion whilst in 2017 the figure was down to below 50 percent. The recognition of the Pope as an authoritative figure of the Church also declined, with a positive assessment of six on a 10-point scale.¹⁰

In November 2018, the Education Committee of the Chamber of Deputies recommended a draft resolution enforcing an existing law concerning biblical readings and instruction in public schools.¹¹ In June 2019, a resolution was passed in the lower house of Congress noting this lack of enforcement. The Ministry of Education declared it would not enforce the law considering this a violation of the constitution and the rights of parents to determine the faith customs of their children.¹²

In June 2019, a new Santo Domingo Metro Users' Manual was published, banning political or religious proselytising through songs, acts, prayers or speeches (Article 34, No. 27).¹³ Yet, the press reported that, despite the ban, the practice of preaching in the Santo Domingo metro continues.¹⁴

The country's Catholic bishops spoke out on a number of social and political issues, notably: In January 2020, they called for action to tackle the country's many serious problems as well as eradicate corruption,¹⁵ and

in February 2020, the prelates backed the demand for explanations of why municipal elections were suspended, calling for a return to dialogue.¹⁶ In this context, a proposal was made to have the Archbishop of Santo Domingo mediate among politicians to help the country overcome the crisis.¹⁷

Faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, the bishops highlighted the need for national solidarity and called on people to respect the decisions taken by the authorities to prevent the spread of the virus.¹⁸

PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Over the period under review, no episodes of violation of religious freedom were reported. A bill on religious freedom is making its way through the Dominican Congress. The Church and other religious organisations are perceived as important actors in national life and the prospects for religious freedom remain stable.

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