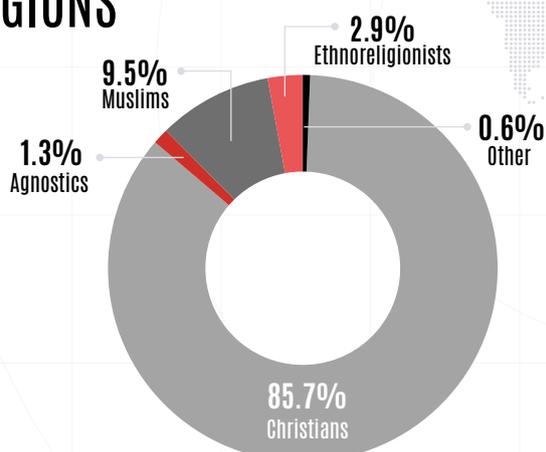




GABON

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

Gabon's 1991 constitution, which was amended in 2003, 2011 and 2018, enshrines in Article 1 (Section 2) freedom of conscience, "thought, opinion, expression, communication, and the free practice of religion, [...] limited only by respect for the public order".¹ This limitation was used once by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to shut down a Church named "Plenitude Exode" in April 2012 after receiving numerous reports of public nuisance relating to noisy prayer services held every night.²

Article 2 of the constitution upholds the secular character of the state and the equality of its citizens regardless of their religion.³ Under Article 1 (13), citizens have the right to form religious communities that "independently regulate themselves and their affairs, respecting the principles of national sovereignty" and "public order". Concerning public education, Article 1 (19) of the constitution stipulates that public education has to be neutral in religious matters.⁴ However, religious instruction in public schools "may be dispensed to students at the demand of their parents".⁵

Religious groups are required to register to avoid certain fees on matters such as land use and building permits.⁶

If a religious group does not comply with these requirements, it can still carry out its activities, but it will be required to pay taxes and duties on imports. The Ministry of Interior, which usually processes registration requests by religious groups within 30 days, rejected more than 100 applications⁷ in 2018. The religious groups whose application the Ministry rejected tended to be "one-man operations" mixing Christian and traditional animist beliefs.⁸ Procedural factors also played a role in applications being turned down as applicants often failed to provide the necessary documentation required to register.

Although Gabon is a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (because Islam is the religion of some of its leaders), it is constitutionally a secular state.⁹ The existing accord with the Holy See gives full legal recognition to the Catholic Church and all its institutions; it also recognises the legality of marriages contracted under canon law.

The following religious feast days are public holidays: All Saints', Ascension, Assumption of Our Lady, Christmas, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, Pentecost, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Kebir.

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

During the period covered by this report, there were no incidents of an interreligious nature or acts of intolerance, discrimination or persecution against any religious group. After the failed military coup in January 2019, the Archbishop of Libreville Basile Mvé Engone said that the people of Gabon “must try to preserve peace, unity and social cohesion”.¹⁰

in West Africa could potentially undermine religious tolerance in the country. The jihadi threat touches many countries in the region such as Nigeria, Cameroon and the DR Congo. Fortunately, the terrorist threat remains relatively low in Gabon and there is no recent history of terrorism in the country.

PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The situation of religious freedom is most likely going to stay the same in the near future, as interreligious relations remain good in an atmosphere of religious tolerance. However, the increasing presence of armed jihadi groups

SOURCES / ENDNOTES

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2 “Pollution sonore à Libreville: le silence des autorités”, Gabon Review, 21st February 2013, <http://www.bdpmodwoam.org/articles/2013/02/21/pollution-sonore-a-libreville-le-silence-des-autorites/> (accessed 13th November 2019).

3 Gabon 1991, op. cit.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, ‘Gabon,’ International Religious Freedom Report for 2018, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/gabon/> (accessed 13th November 2019).

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 “Historique des concordats et accords conclus par le Saint-Siège”, Zenit, 15th November 2005, <https://fr.zenit.org/articles/historique-des-concordats-et-accords-conclus-par-le-saint-siege/> (accessed 22nd January 2020).

10 “Crisis in Togo and Gabon: the Bishops denounce violence and invite them to dialogue,” Agenzia Fides, 14th January 2019, http://www.fides.org/en/news/65380-AFRICA_Crisis_in_Togo_and_Gabon_the_Bishops_denounce_violence_and_invite_them_to_dialogue (accessed 13th November 2019).