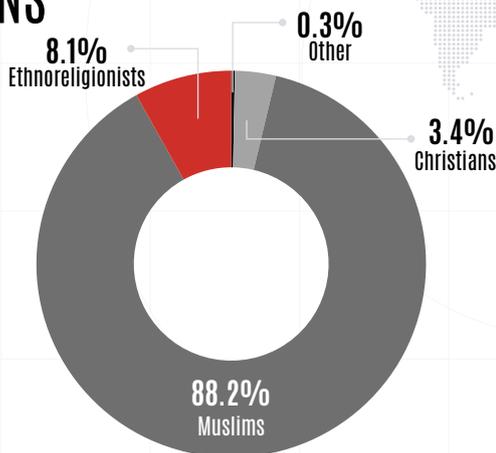




GUINEA CONAKRY

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

The Constitution of Guinea affirms the secular nature of the state (Article 154) and “the equality before the law of all citizens without distinction” of origin, race, ethnicity, gender, religion and opinion (Article 1).¹ It forbids political parties based on race, ethnicity and religion (Article 3), and punishes religious discrimination (Article 4). The constitutional text guarantees the right of individuals to choose and profess their religion (Article 7). Moreover, it guarantees that religious institutions are managed freely (Article 14), even though in practice the government has historically intervened in religious affairs.²

The Republic of Guinea has great ethnic and religious diversity, and the rights of its various groups are generally respected, despite the government’s authoritarian tendencies. After more than 50 years of autocratic rule under presidents Sekou Touré (1958-84) and Lansana Conté (1984-2008) and a number of short-lived transitional governments, Guinea held its first largely free presidential elections in 2010.³ In October 2015, President Alpha Condé won almost 58 per cent of the vote and was re-elected for a second term. Under Article 27 of the constitution, that would have been his last. However, on September 2019 he announced a referendum to change the constitution and scrap the two-term limit. This decision sparked numerous demonstrations in several

cities around the country.⁴

Muslims are the majority in every province of Guinea. Ethno-religionists are the second largest group. Christian communities are located primarily in the larger cities as well as in the southern and eastern regions.⁵ The country is also home to small groups of Bahá’ís, Hindus and Buddhists. Religious coexistence is traditionally good in Guinea. An interfaith council works closely with the government on religious affairs.⁶

Religious communities must register with the Secretariat of Religious Affairs (SRA) and each faith group must report on its activities every six months. Registered groups enjoy VAT tax exemptions on incoming goods and select energy subsidies.⁷ There were no reports of major difficulties in this regard during the reporting period.

The government, through the SRA, requires mosques and churches to follow mandatory themes in their weekly sermons. The goal is to “harmonize religious views in order prevent radical and political messages in sermons”.⁸ In every region, SRA inspectors monitor the latter to ensure “that mosque and church sermons are consistent with SRA directives”.⁹ Clerics who do not follow the directives can be subjected to disciplinary action.

Concerning religious education, Islamic schools - private or government funded - remain the traditional environment for religious education teaching the compulsory government curriculum along

with Quranic studies. Private Christian schools, open to Christian and non-Christian students, are present in the major cities also teaching the compulsory government curriculum, however, receive no government support. Although not officially recognised by the government local madrassahs, some associated with mosques, are able to operate. Focused on Quranic studies, the education is in Arabic and not French and some are supported with monies coming from Saudi Arabia and some Gulf states. Most madrassah students also attend public or private schools thus receiving the compulsory government program.¹⁰

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

In 2019, the government continued to provide financial assistance to religious pilgrims. For the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj), the SRA funded the travel expenses of 8,000 Guinean Muslims.¹¹

Formally, no religion enjoys special rights; however, the Muslim community wields considerable influence, as it is by far the largest religious group in the country. Government authorities were present at various Muslim events throughout 2019. The prime minister and several government officials attended the annual National Islamic Conference.¹² Moreover, President Condé participated in various Muslim celebrations and travelled to Mecca as part of the Umrah pilgrimage (which, unlike Hajj, can be undertaken at any time of the year).¹³

Christian religious leaders continued to complain about this apparent preferential treatment received by the Muslim community from the government. The Evangelical Protestant Church

marked its 100th anniversary in Guinea with a large ceremony in January 2019. High-ranking government officials did not participate despite being invited.¹⁴

Concerning the political situation, clashes between security forces and demonstrators over a possible extension of the presidential term limit left 20 civilians and one gendarme dead.¹⁵ The demonstrations occurred as a result of the extension of the presidential term limits in a controversial referendum that was backed by 90 per cent of voters in March 2020 and that allowed President Condé to be elected for a third term. Several religious organisations have called for a peaceful resolution to the crisis, including the Catholic Church of Guinea, which has appealed for “political dialogue”.¹⁶ Furthermore, the European Parliament called on the government to protect the right to freedom of assembly and to investigate and prosecute members of the security forces who were responsible for human rights violations.¹⁷

PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

As a number of reports indicate that countries of western Africa and the Gulf of Guinea are increasingly under the threat of armed jihadi groups and their ideology.¹⁸ The consequences that the spread of jihadism in western Africa will have for Guinea remain to be seen. Thus far, the country – which has a long tradition of peaceful coexistence among religions – has successfully managed to counter jihadist groups. Social instability, as a result of the political situation, is likely to persist in the near future. This combination of jihadism and social instability risks affecting freedom of religion in the future.

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