

Guinea (24)

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Government reportedly favors Muslims over non-Muslims.

Relations between the various religions are generally amicable; however, in some areas, strong social pressure discourages non-Muslims from practicing their religion openly, and the Government tends to defer to local Muslim sensibilities.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total land area of 94,926 square miles, and its population is 7,775,065 based on recent estimate. Islam is demographically, socially, and culturally the dominant religion. According to credible estimates, approximately 85 percent of the population adheres to Islam, 10 percent follow various Christian faiths, and 5 percent hold traditional indigenous beliefs. Muslims in the country generally adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam; adherents of the Shi'a branch remain relatively few, although they are increasing in number. Among the Christian groups, there are Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventist, and evangelical churches active in the country and recognized by the Government. There is a small Baha'i community. There are small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and practitioners of traditional Chinese religions among the expatriate community. Few, if any, citizens profess atheism.

Although there are no known organized heterogeneous or syncretistic religious communities, both Islam and Christianity have developed syncretistic tendencies, which reflect the continuing influence and acceptability of traditional indigenous beliefs and rituals.

Geographically, Muslims are a majority in all four major regions. Christians are most numerous in the capital, in the southern part of the country, and in the eastern forest region. Christians are found in all large towns throughout the country, with the exception of the Fouta Jallon region in the middle of the country, where the deep cultural entrenchment of Islam in Pular (Fulani or Peuli) society makes it difficult for other religions to establish religious communities. Traditional indigenous religions are most prevalent in the forest region.

No data is available on active participation in formal religious services or rituals; however, the National Islamic League (NIL), a government sponsored organization, estimates that 70 percent of Muslims practice their faith regularly.

The country's large immigrant and refugee populations generally practice the same faiths as citizens, although those from neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone have higher percentages of Christians and adherents of traditional indigenous religions.

Foreign missionary groups are active in the country and include Roman Catholic, Philafricaine, Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, and many American missionary societies. Saudi and Kuwaiti groups preaching the Wahhabism form of Islam are also known to operate in various areas of the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion; however, the Government reportedly favors Muslims over non-Muslims.

The Government requires that all recognized Christian churches join the Association of Churches and Missions to benefit from certain government privileges such as tax benefits and energy subsidies. The registration process requires the submission of a Church's bylaws, statutes, and/or covenants for review by the Association. Churches generally receive approvals after an average period of 2 years. Despite the Government's requirement for registration, there are a number of religious groups that operate freely without official recognition or registration.

The small Baha'i community practices its faith openly and freely, although it is not officially recognized; however, it is unknown whether the community has asked for official recognition.

Missionary groups are required to make a declaration of their aims and activities to the Ministry of Interior or to the NIL. With rare exceptions, foreign missionary groups and church-affiliated relief agencies operate freely in the country. There were no reports during the period covered by this report that government officials obstructed or limited missionary activities by Jehovah's Witnesses, although they reported isolated instances of harassment in the past.

The government-controlled official press reports on religious events involving both Islamic and Christian groups.

There is a general tradition of Koranic schools, particularly strong in the Fouta Djallon region that was ruled during the 18th century as an Islamic theocracy. There also are a few scattered "Madrasa" schools usually associated with a mosque in the northern part of the country. Private radical Islamic groups sponsor them with foreign funds, and these schools have no link with the public school system and are not recognized by the Government.

Missionaries also run their own schools with no interference from the Government. Catholic and Protestant schools exist primarily in Conakry, but throughout the country as well. They teach the National Curriculum (which is not influenced by religion), and there is a special education component for Christians. Lack of government investment in education infrastructure makes any kind of schooling attractive for citizens.

Both Muslim and Christian holidays are recognized by the Government and celebrated by the population.

The Government does not have a specific program to promote interfaith understanding; however, the Government utilizes all religious groups in its civic education efforts and national prayers for peace.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The NIL represents the country's Sunni Muslim majority. The NIL distributes official sermons for Friday prayer at mosque and appoints imams to those mosques under its supervision. The NIL's stated policy is to promote better relations with other religious denominations and dialog aimed at ameliorating interethnic and interreligious tensions. The Government and NIL have spoken out against the proliferation of Shi'a fundamentalist groups on the grounds that they "generate confusion and deviation" within the country's Islamic family. On at least one occasion, they have refused to allow the opening of a foreign-funded Shi'a Islamic school, but otherwise have not restricted the religious activities of these groups.

Government support of the powerful, semi-official NIL has led some non-Muslims to complain that the Government uses its influence to favor Muslims over non-Muslims, although non-Muslims are represented in the Cabinet, administrative bureaucracy, and the armed forces. Conversions of senior officials to Islam, such as the former Defense Minister, are ascribed to the NIL's efforts to influence the religious beliefs of senior government leaders. The Government refrains from appointing non-Muslims to important administrative positions in certain parts of the country, in deference to the particularly strong social dominance of Islam in these regions. In July 2000, the Government announced that it would finance the renovation of Conakry's grand mosque, the mosque at which President Conte worships. The renovation was completed in 2002. Identification of the NIL with the Government has led some Muslims to join more independent and fundamentalist mosques not under NIL control.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Relations between the various religions are generally amicable; however, in some parts of the country, Islam's dominance is such that there is strong social pressure that discourages non-Muslims from practicing their religion openly.

There have been no reports of clashes between Christian and Muslim groups during the period covered by this report.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government maintains contact with clergy and religious leaders from all major religious communities, monitors developments affecting religious freedom, and discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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