

2024

Global Religious Recognition Report

DEDICATED TO SETTING STANDARDS
FOR RECOGNITION & REGISTRATION
POLICY TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS OF
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

MAJOR EVENTS

A look at the year's challenges and triumphs by country and territory on recognition and registration issues

INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

An abridged article by Monica Gyimah on recognition and registration issues specifically impacting indigenous peoples

REPORT THIRD EDITION

What are the aims and overall purpose of the GRR report?



2024 Global Religious Recognition Report

REPORT INFORMATION

Report Publication Date: 15th August 2024

Report Authors: Brandon Reece Taylorian, Monica Gyimah

Report Publisher: The Religious Recognition Project

Cover image: free-to-use image by Saa R.

Main source: United States Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report*

Publication Code Identifier (PCI): GRR2024

Report Summary:

The Global Religious Recognition Report provides details to both academics in the field of religious freedom as well as human rights organisations on the structure and functions of each country and territory's recognition system, including extensive analysis of recognition and registration issues. Our report looks at freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) through the lens of religious recognition by considering how states use or misuse recognition and registration procedures to control their citizens' religious activities. This report gives an overview of each country's recognition and registration systems using information mainly from the U.S. Department of State's 2023 *International Religious Freedom Report*. The purpose of the Global Religious Recognition Report is to bring attention to religious freedom advocates and the broader public the scale of recognition and registration issues to encourage states to reform their policies and practices so that their recognition and registration systems keep in alignment with their national and international commitments on FoRB.

More information:

Please visit www.cometan.org/rorb for the official website page of The Religious Recognition Project. To learn more about the research works of Cometan on the matters of religious recognition, please click the link: <https://www.cometan.org/freedom-of-religion-specialist>

If you would like to contact Cometan directly regarding any matter with pertaining to religious recognition and religious freedom, please send an email to: brtaylorian@uclan.ac.uk.

This report is published free of charge by The Religious Recognition Project as the Project's premier annual report. The redistribution of this report is only permitted for educational purposes. Any persons caught attempting to charge money to purchasers of this report will hear from the Director of The Religious Recognition Project.

It is preferred that The Religious Recognition Project is made aware of all instances in which this report is utilised for educational purposes for our records. You may notify us of this by contacting Cometan at the following email: brtaylorian@uclan.ac.uk.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCING RoRB	Page 4
METHODOLOGY	Page 4
THE SRR	Page 5
RoRB BY COUNTRY	Page 6
RoRB BY DEPENDENT OR DISPUTED TERRITORY	Page 202
GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS	Page 254
ABRIDGED ARTICLE BY DR MONICA GYIMAH	Page 255
OTHER WORKS	Page 259

INTRODUCING RoRB

RoRB is the acronym for "recognition of religion or belief" which itself refers to the conditions that national recognition systems are in when it comes to how they bestow both symbolic and legal forms of recognition to religious groups and their affiliate organisations. Each country possesses a recognition system; that is, legal and non-legal procedures for recognising and registering belief systems (e.g. religions, philosophies), the institutions that represent them and the communities that adhere to them. Countries vary widely on the degree to which they use their recognition systems fairly and reasonably; some have a long history of establishing a particular religion or denomination as the national religion, some, while having disestablished a previous state religion continue to provide it privileges not made available to all other groups, while other countries have chosen a strict separation of the nation state from the religious affairs of citizens.

What the research conducted as part of The Religious Recognition Project has found so far is that issues involving recognition and registration are coming to have a negative impact on people's rights to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). Further still, some countries look to be using their recognition systems and the apparatus of legal and symbolic mechanisms that they encompass to restrict or otherwise control what their citizens believe, how they express their beliefs and indeed, how they put them into practice. However, it is not purely individual rights of central concern to RoRB; in fact, what is called institutional religious freedom (IRF) is oftentimes at the forefront of erosion when recognition systems are misused which is in turn holding drastic effects on FoRB conditions as a whole. The development of RoRB seeks to bring a much needed focus to religious recognition issues as they pertain to religious freedom by identifying the scale at which recognition systems are misused, establishing a terminology to properly organise this recognition branch of FoRB and ultimately, to establish standards for what is and is not acceptable practice and policy of countries when it comes to dealing with the admittedly difficult area of how to legally register and appropriately recognise the religious and philosophical beliefs of all citizens.

METHODOLOGY

Data produced as part the Global Religious Recognition Report is the culmination of The Religious Recognition Project's monitoring of national law and policy relevant to religious registration and recognition with a particular focus on institutional religious freedom (IRF). The Report has reproduced this data through a particular RoRB lens by providing opinion and assessment on the nature, severity and actual function of policies set down in countries to deal with the over 120 variables presently identified in The Religious Recognition Project's research relevant to the overall religious recognition topic. What this means is that the Global Religious Recognition Project not only provides data on religious recognition conditions around the world but extends interpretation, opinion and assessment of these conditions expressed through the RoRB terminology developed through The Religious Recognition Project. Please note: precise definitions of most terms relating to RoRB issues may be found in the First Edition of *The Institutional Dictionary of Freedom of Religion or Belief* (published July 2021). Please refer to the Glossary at the end of this report for definitions of key terms used.

In addition to the Project's own monitoring capabilities, data on religious registration in particular is sourced from the United States Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* which is arguably the most comprehensive religious freedom report to provide on-the-ground insight from ambassadors and embassy staff regarding the legal framework of registration procedures for religious groups and organisations in each sovereign state. In addition to the State Department report, reports from Freedom House have helped to inform the Project's understanding of the impacts of RoRB on FoRB in terms of how different communities face systematic discrimination and persecution. Additional sources of information also relevant to RoRB have been GOV.UK Travel Advice to reconfirm what countries regard as illegal acts as they pertain to proselytising or religious freedom and the FedEx Cross Border Global Lists of Prohibited and Restricted Items when it comes to the topic of hieroncy (the importation of religious items into a country for both personal and distributive purposes).

THE SRR

Classification (Countries may move and down the spectrum)	Overview (Descriptions are approximate to present known conditions and relate to actions by states or state-backed entities).	Features (Countries must exhibit at least one of these features to qualify for being included in the classification).
Dynamic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system adapts so it can recognise a range of religions and beliefs and is inclusive of NRMs. The system encompasses a capacity both for recognition and for registration. The system works in collaboration with a range of religions to facilitate their activities including both their day-to-day survival and growth as well as interfaith dialogue. The system exhibits all the essential attributes of accessibility, equitability and visibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An independent agency is established to handle both recognition and registration. Registration is a simple procedure that is made available to NRMs; recognition is available to NRMs. Unregistered religious organisations can operate unhindered and have access to financial benefits also available to registered organisations. Use of language inclusive of NRMs in legislation and services to facilitate a range of religious organisations.
Receptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system primarily accommodates 'traditional' religions and beliefs in contrast to NRMs which is reflected in state policy and practice. Although the system is responsive to major registration issues, minor issues persist and it lacks the adaptability necessary to facilitate a range of religions and beliefs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedures for recognition and registration exist yet the state does not always allow all NRMs to access them. Some issues and restrictions in registration procedures persist but registration remains optional for religious organisations to exercise 'basic religious activities.'
Apathetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There exist procedures for legal registration but none for recognition yet FoRB is broadly upheld in practice. The absence of recognition procedures limits the capacity of the state to fulfil its responsibilities in providing adequate services and in building a culture facilitative of religions and beliefs old and new. State intent is to uphold FoRB yet factors continue to halt recognition from being used to facilitate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FoRB is broadly upheld by the government in practice. No procedures exist for the recognition of religions and beliefs besides registration. Recognition is reduced to tax exemption which is achieved through legal registration.
Restrictive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The registration system has several internal issues yet these are primarily administrative problems that do not translate to censorship or violence. These issues result in the restriction of religious activity and the subjugation of aspects of FoRB yet violence is not used by the state to maintain these restrictions. State intent is to control or limit aspects of organised religious activity through the use of registration laws. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A policy of pseudo-mandatory registration for religious or belief organisations is imposed. Administrative restrictions on the registration process place limits on what organisations can freely and legally do, especially in violation of at least one of the rights already protected internationally under FoRB.
Censorious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition and registration procedures have critical issues that significantly and negatively impact FoRB. The state achieves its aim of restricting religious activity through the threat and intermittent use of violence. State intent is to suppress either all or certain religions or beliefs in favour of a privileged religion or irreligion. 	All 'Restrictive' category features, in addition to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state intermittently uses violence to enforce restrictions on religious activity. Unregistered religious activity is criminalised either as an administrative or criminal penalty. At least one nationwide prohibition of a religion or belief is upheld.
Terminal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition and registration are continuously misused to severely restrict multiple rights protected by FoRB. The state achieves its aim of controlling religious activity through the regular use of systematic violence. The state uses the national recognition system and registration procedures to suppress most forms of religious activity to ensure the dominance of a state religion, a privileged religion or belief or state atheism. 	All 'Restrictive' and 'Censorious' category features, in addition to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state regularly uses violence to enforce restrictions placed on religious activity. The state orchestrates an apparatus of interlinked policies to suppress all or 'unfavoured' religions or beliefs.

Afghanistan, Islamic Emirate of

No UN-member state has formally recognised the Taliban regime since its takeover in 2021 although several countries have de facto recognised it by engaging in communications with Taliban officials.



Conditions of state recognition and registration

2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

ForB Claim: A partial claim was made in the 2004 constitution that subjected ForB to Sharia law, although now the Taliban even rejects this provision.

Secularity: State religion is Islam (no denominational specification is given, although the Taliban have said that Sunni Hanafi jurisprudence is the basis for the legal system); theism is affirmed in the constitution.

Protections: No explicit protection against discrimination granted to religious or irreligious communities.

Human rights instruments: Afghanistan is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Afghanistan voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatory registration: non-registration (for non-Islamic groups) and optional (for mosques and madrassahs only) with one official claiming that unregistered mosques may still receive government support and financial benefits. The Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs reports 7,000 registered mosques.

Registration policy: non-registration – there are no formal procedures established for non-Islamic religious organisations to gain legal status in Afghanistan; optional registration – mosques and madrassahs have the choice to register but their activities are closely monitored by Taliban officials whether registered or unregistered.

Key restriction tools imposed: religion by default (national identity cards include a citizen's religion; the government has claimed that declaring belief in Islam is not necessary for receiving citizenship), legal registration is made exclusive to Islamic groups, non-recognition for any non-Islamic religion or any non-Sunni denomination, prohibition of the Baha'i Faith and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; conversion from Islam is illegal); **hieronymy** (not free; non-Islamic items prohibited); **monasticism** (not free; non-Islamic monastic activity is prohibited); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted to Islamic rites only); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted to Islamic pastoral services only); **proselytism** (not free; non-Islamic proselytism is illegal); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted to Islamic forms only; Afghan girls are banned from attending secondary school and university); **religious literature** (not free; illegal to produce and distribute anti-Islamic literature which can include all non-Islamic religious literature); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the abusive uses of recognition in the country; use recognition as a means to spread awareness of the acceptability of the diversity of belief; stop the use of systematic violence in order to achieve goals of restriction and censorship, especially against Muslim minorities and non-Islamic religious groups; establish registration procedures for non-Islamic religious or belief organisations and their affiliated organisations.

Albania, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: **Receptive**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Albania is a secular state; however, theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2012; the government has bilateral cooperation agreements (BCAs) with the Sunni Albanian Muslim Community (AMC), Bektashi Muslim community, Roman Catholic Church, Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (AOC), and the Protestant umbrella organisation Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania (VUSH).

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination granted to religious but no explicit protection granted to irreligious.

Human rights instruments: Albania is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Albania did not vote on the UDHR; Albania is party to the ECHR.

Mandatory of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – officially, religious organisations are not obliged to register with the government but they must register with the Tirana District Court as ‘nonprofit associations’ to gain the right to open a bank account in the organisation’s name, own property and to become eligible for exemption from certain taxes; a judge is randomly assigned to the registration case within four days and the adjudication completed within one working day; units of information requested to complete registration include a group constitution such as details on the activities and structure of the religious organisation, the identity of its founders and legal representatives, the nature of its interactions with other stakeholders and the address of the organisation; the registration fee is 2,000 lek (\$21); religious organisations and their subsidiaries or affiliates must obtain permits for newly-acquired buildings or for any building built before 2014. Religious communities wishing to reclaim property confiscated during the Communist era must first obtain ownership title from the court and then register the properties with the SAC in the official register established in 2020 to show quantity, value, and ownership of real estate.

Key restriction tools imposed: BCAs are used in Albania as a form of recognition but are not made available to all religious groups (e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses have been denied their own BCA and have filed a court appeal to challenge this decision), BCAs codify arrangements pertaining to official recognition, property restitution, tax exemptions on income, donations, and religious property, exemption from submitting accounting records for religious activities and direct the government to provide financial support to the four religious communities with BCAs; there are borderline excessive informational requirements and ongoing bureaucratic issues with the legislation of religious buildings.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Provide an opportunity for new religious movements to gain access to BCAs; remove the concessional benefit of the right to open a bank account and own property as conditions of registration; reduce informational requirements during registration; resolve administrative issues with property legislation and the restitution of religious buildings.

Algeria, People's Democratic Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

ForRB Claim: Partial claim is made.

Secularity: Sunni Islam is the state denomination; theism is affirmed in the presidential oath and all presidential candidates must be Muslim.

Protections: The constitution states discrimination based on religion is prohibited and guarantees state protection for non-Muslims and for the "toleration and respect of different religions."

Human rights instruments: Algeria is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Algeria did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – all religious organisations must register with the government as an 'association' before conducting any activities, even activities classified as "basic" in RoRB standards and protected under international law on ForRB; a mandatory re-registration order was issued in 2012 for all religious organisations that had been previously registered; the National Commission for Non-Muslim Worship, which is chaired by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA), handles the registration religious organisations once a legal compliance review has been completed by Ministry of Interior (MOI). Only registered 'associations' are officially recognised in law and may legally open a bank account in the organisation's name, convene gatherings for worship or religious services, raise funds and own property for religious purposes; participating in unregistered religious activity is illegal; conducting religious activities beyond buildings not specifically registered for such purposes is also illegal; to complete registration as a national-level association, applicant religious organisations must create a charter that identifies the organisation's leader(s), any addresses affiliated with the applicant organisation, as well as biographic details, police and judicial records to prove good standing in society, demonstrate founding members reside in at least one quarter of the country's provinces to prove the association merits national standing, submit the association's constitution signed by its president and submit documents indicating the location of its headquarters. The MOI is obliged by law to provide a receipt for an application once it has received all required documentation. The MOI has up to sixty days to respond to applicants and if it does not respond within this timeframe, the application is automatically approved with the receipt of documentation submission able to be used as proof of registration. If the MOI considers the documentation submitted to be incomplete, it will not issue a receipt. The law grants the government full discretion in making registration decisions but allows applicants to appeal a denial to an administrative tribunal. For associations seeking to register at the local or wilaya (provincial) level, application requirements are similar, but an association's membership and sphere of activity is strictly limited to the area in which it registers. An association registered at the wilaya level is confined to that specific wilaya. The MRA is legally responsible for reviewing registration applications of associations of a religious nature and to support non-Islamic communities with the process. The MRA meets on an ad-hoc basis and is composed of senior representatives of the Ministries of National Defense, Interior, and Foreign Affairs; the Presidency; national police; national gendarmerie; and the governmental National Human Rights Council (CNDH). Registered religious associations must receive prior authorisation from the government in order to legally receive funding from political parties or foreign-based entities and individuals. Non-Islamic religious services may only legally take place in buildings registered with the government for that specific purpose, be open to the public and marked as such on the exterior. A request for permission to observe special non-Islamic religious events must be submitted to the relevant wali (governor) at least five days before the event, and the event must occur in buildings accessible to the public. Requests must include information on three principal organisers of the event, its purpose, the number of attendees anticipated, a schedule of events, and its planned location. The wali may request the organisers move the location of an event or deny permission for it to take place if the wali deems it would endanger public order or harm "national constants," "good mores," or "symbols of the revolution." If unauthorised meetings go forward without approval, police may disperse the participants. According to the penal code, individuals who fail to disperse at the behest of police are subject to arrest and a prison term of two to 12 months. The penal code states that only government-authorised imams, whom the state hires and trains, may lead prayers in mosques and penalises anyone else who preaches in a mosque with a fine of up to 100,000 dinars (\$740) and a prison sentence of one to three years. The law states the government must approve any modification of structures intended for non-Islamic collective worship.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, confinement to wilayas (provinces), dual registration, excessive informational requirements used with nefarious intent, mandatory reregistration (for all groups registered before 2012), non-recognition for non-Islamic religions, non-response to applications (several groups still awaiting "authorisation" after many attempts to register since 2012), non-response to foreign workers' visa applications, separate registration procedures for Muslim and non-Muslim groups, verticalism, prosecution of members of Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light and Christian minorities for unauthorised gatherings, proselytising and illegal fundraising, forced closure of buildings.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hieronymy** (not free; restricted; the Ministries of Religious Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Commerce must approve the importation of all printed materials, including religious texts and items, except those intended for personal use. Authorities generally consider "importation" to be approximately 20 or more religious texts or items); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted to Islamic pastoral services only); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; non-Islamic proselytism is illegal); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; illegal to produce and distribute non-Islamic literature); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the abusive uses of registration in the country and the body of laws that perpetuate this misuse, including the broad mandatory policy; stop the policy of confinement, reduce informational requirements, and dismantle the vertical recognition system.

Andorra, Principality of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.



Secularity: Andorra is officially a secular state; however, the constitution acknowledges a special relationship with the Roman Catholic Church which receives privileges not granted to non-Catholic religious groups. For example, non-Catholic groups do not have legal status as religious entities and non-Catholic missionaries are not classified as religious workers

Protections: Explicit protection granted against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Andorra is party to the ICCPR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Andorra is not party to the ICESCR; Andorra did not vote on the UDHR; Andorra is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration mixed with non-registration – non-Catholic religious organisations are only able to register under the secular designation ‘nonprofit cultural organisation’ according to the law on associations which does not specifically mention religious groups. To register, non-Catholic religious organisations must provide their statutes and foundational agreement, a statement certifying the names of persons appointed to the board or other official positions, and a patrimony declaration that identifies the inheritance or endowment of the organisation. A consolidated register of associations records all types of associations, including religious groups.

Key restriction tools imposed: non-registration policy for non-Catholic religious organisations to be recognised in law as entities of a religious nature, non-recognition for all non-Catholic religions.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Either disestablish the privileges of the Catholic Church or extend these privileges to all religious groups that seek them; reduce borderline excessive informational requirements and establish registration procedures for non-Catholic religious groups to be recognised as religious entities in law.

Angola, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Angola is officially a secular state; however, a BCA between the Holy See and the Angolan government grants privileges to the Roman Catholic Church that are not extended to other religious groups, namely how the government recognises Catholic wedding ceremonies without requiring an additional civil ceremony.

Protections: Explicit protection granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Angola is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Angola did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory and malregistration.

Registration policy: quasi-mandatory registration – the government of Angola requires all religious organisations to register with it before conducting any activities, even those such as propagation and worship services which are considered by international standards as fundamental to FoRB. However, this order goes largely unenforced as evidenced by the low registration rate for religious groups. Legal registration and existential recognition are amalgamated with registration resulting in 'legal recognition'. The government maintains the legal ability to forcibly close the premises of unregistered religious groups. 'Legal recognition' from the National Institute for Religious Affairs (INAR), which is overseen by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, specifically allows religious organisations to purchase property and use its property to hold religious events, exempts it from paying certain property and import taxes, authorises the group to be treated as an incorporated entity in the court system and allows clerics from registered religious organisations the legal ability to contribute to Angola's social security system which entitles them to a pension. The law requires 60,000 member signatures from legal residents to apply for registration and requires that at least 1,000 of the signatures originate from members residing in each of the country's 18 provinces (estimated cost is \$4 per signature, creating a de facto registration fee of \$240,000). Each signature and resident declaration must be notarised separately. Religious groups must also submit documents defining their organisational structure, location, methods and schedule of worship, financial resources, and planned construction projects. The law also establishes requirements for clergy and requires religious doctrine to conform to the general principles and rights outlined in the constitution and the INAR is responsible for analysing doctrine to ensure it conforms to constitutional principles. The INAR has the power to grant provisional registration while religious groups complete the registration process to allow them to be legally active in the meantime.

Malregistration – the ongoing Cabinda War undermines the central government's ability to apply registration law in that territory.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, excessive informational requirements, excessive qualifications, low registration rate (no new groups were registered in 2023; the registration rate in the country is low with 88 registered religious groups but more than 1,200 unregistered), non-response, signature quota, signature-geographic quota, excessive notarisation fees to fulfil signatures quota, unregistered groups are banned from purchasing property and holding events at their own property; Catholic Church is the only group with a BCA and whose marriages are recognised (which may indicate religious favouritism).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (free); **pastoral services** (free); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (free); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (free); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Dismantle signature quotas of all kinds and halt the misuse of registration to filter out religious groups the government is unaccustomed to, the government needs to begin registering more new religious groups and non-Christian groups, the mandatory registration policy must be abolished, benefits granted to the Roman Catholic Church through its BCA with the government need to be offered to all communities.



Antigua and Barbuda



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Antigua and Barbuda is officially a secular state; however, member denominations of the Antigua Christian Council receive privileges not granted to non-Christian denominations or Christian denominations belonging to the Council; theism was affirmed in the 1981 constitution.

Protections: Explicit protection granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Antigua and Barbuda is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Antigua and Barbuda did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – the government of Antigua and Barbuda only requires religious organisations to register with it to access the legal right to own, build or renovate property in their organisation's name. Registration also confers the financial benefits of tax and duty-free concessions. To register, groups must fill out a tax form online that includes a description of their activities which the government uses to determine the organisation's tax status. The Inland Revenue Department is the government department responsible for reviewing and approving registration applications.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, unregistered religious groups are prohibited from owning, building, or renovating property for religious services to be held in.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (not free; restricted); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish clearer differentiation between registration and recognition; establish a recognition system that is receptive to both established groups and to new religious movements.

Argentine Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Argentina is officially a secular state; however, the 1994 revised constitution stated that the government would support Roman Catholicism which has led to state privilege for the Roman Catholic Church such as its exemption from the need to register to gain benefits; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1994.

Protections: Explicit protection granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion with fines and jail time listed as retributions.

Human rights instruments: Argentina is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Argentina voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – the Argentine government claims that registration for religious organisations is not mandatory but in law, completing registration is required for religious groups to conduct “public activities” which is already protected under international law on FoRB. While registration is not required for private religious services held in homes, it may be necessary to conduct activities in public parks depending on the regulations of the city authority which may request a permit. However, to gain a permit, an organisation must already be registered with the Secretariat of Worship. Religious organisations are required to register as both civil associations and as religious groups to become eligible for the full range of benefits that the Roman Catholic Church receives without having to register. The benefits of registering include tax-exempt status, visas for religious officials, and the ability to hold public activities. To qualify for registration, religious organisation must have a place of worship, an organisational charter and an ordained clergy. To register a religious group, religious organisations are required to register with the Secretariat of Worship and to register as civil associations, religious organisations are required to register with the Public Registry of Commerce. Once registered, an organisation must report to the Secretariat of Worship any significant changes or decisions made regarding its leadership, structure, size of membership, and address of its headquarters. Foreign missionaries of registered religious groups must apply to the Secretariat of Worship which verifies the religious group is registered, authorised and active. The Secretariat, in turn, requests that immigration authorities issue appropriate documents.

Key restriction tools imposed: dual registration (registration is required with both the Secretariat of Worship and the Inspector General of Justice), excessive monitorial requirements, excessive qualifications required for registration (a place of worship and an ordained clergy), non-recognition, vertical registration system (verticalism).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (not free; restricted); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (not free; possibly restricted if considered "public activities" if a group is unregistered); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish two distinct systems, one to deal with existential recognition and another for legal registration; remove the pseudo-mandatory registration policy; remove excessive monitorial requirements and qualifications for registration as well as the vertical registration system to ensure religious equality.



Armenia, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: **Restrictive**

ForRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Armenia is officially a secular state (the Armenian Apostolic Church was disestablished in 1921); however, the constitution from 2015 recognises the Armenian Apostolic Church as the national church which receives privileges not granted to other religious organisations.

Protections: **Explicit protection granted in the constitution against hate speech or inciting violence based on religion.**

Human rights instruments: Armenia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Armenia did not vote on the UDHR; Armenia is party to the ECHR.

Mandatory registration: **mandatory.**

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – while the Armenian government does not explicitly mandate that religious organisations register with it, religious organisations must register to conduct any financial transactions in their own name, including owning or renting property for religious services or opening a bank account. Registered religious organisations may also legally minister to the religious and spiritual needs of its adherents; perform religious liturgies, rites, and ceremonies; establish groups for religious instruction; engage in theological, religious, historical, and cultural studies; train members for the clergy or for scientific and pedagogical purposes; obtain and utilise objects and materials of religious significance; use media; establish ties with religious organisations in other countries; and engage in charity. The law does not stipulate rights accorded to unregistered groups. To register, a religious organisation must present to the Office of the State Registrar an assessment from the Office of the Prime Minister's Division of Religious Affairs and National Minorities stating its expert opinion on whether the community complies with the requirements of the law that it be based on "historically recognised holy scripture." It also must be "free from materialism and [be] of a spiritual nature," have at least 200 adult members, and follow a doctrine espoused by a member of the "international modern system" of religious communities. The law does not define "free from materialism", or state which religious communities are part of the "international modern system." The law specifies that this list of registration requirements, to which the Division of Religious Affairs and National Minorities must attest, does not apply to a religious organisation based on the faith of one of the groups recognised as national minorities, including Assyrians, Kurds, Russians and Yezidis. A religious community may appeal a decision by the Office of the State Registrar through the courts. Employees of the National Security Service (NSS) are prohibited from being members of a religious organisation or from using their official position to the benefit of a "religious association" or to show support for any religion. While the law defines a "religious organisation" as an association of citizens established for professing a common faith as well as for fulfilling other religious needs, it provides no definition for "religious associations." The law prohibits religious organisations from establishing "public organisations," the legal term for registered nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The law prohibits, but does not define, "soul hunting," a term describing both proselytism and forced conversion. The law prohibits religious organisations with spiritual centers located outside the country from receiving funding from those foreign centers, but there is no mechanism to enforce this provision. However, in October 2023, a law came into effect allowing registered religious organisations to invite foreign citizens to perform missionary work in the country.

Key restriction tools imposed: excessive qualifications required for registration, membership quota, non-recognition of denominations other than the Armenian Apostolic Church, rights of unregistered groups remain unaddressed in law, some registration benefits are classified under "basic religious activities" meaning such activities should not subject to a group's registered status, prohibition on proselytising.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; prohibited as "soul hunting"); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Establish differentiated systems for recognition and registration; establish clarity as to the rights provisions of unregistered groups; abolish excessive qualifications and the membership quota; reform pseudo-mandatory policy.

Australia, Commonwealth of



2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Australia is a secular state; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution revised in 1985.

Protections: Explicit protection granted in law against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Australia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC; Australia rejected the UNDRIP; Australia voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – the Australian government does not require religious organisations to register to conduct the full range of religious activities protected under FoRB. However, to receive tax exemptions on income, goods and services, a religious organisation are required to register with the Australian Taxation Office as a ‘nonprofit entity.’ An organisation's activities, size, and permanence are some of the factors considered by the Office when it determines tax-exempt status.

Key restriction tools imposed: lack of mechanism for state recognition of religions besides registration as a nonprofit entity, membership and longevity are factors taken into consideration when the government determines tax-exempt status, lack of mechanism for the registration of religious organisations specifically as religious entities.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a set of differentiated systems for both existential recognition and legal registration; more clarity required as to the membership and longevity qualifications required for tax-exempt status.

Austria, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made. The law provides for freedom of religious belief and the rights of all residents to join, participate in, leave, or abstain from association with any religious community.

Secularity: Austria is officially a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1918); however, an agreement between the Holy See and the Austrian government makes several Catholic holy days official national holidays.

Protections: Explicit protection granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion; the ECHR is integrated into the Austrian constitution.

Human rights instruments: Austria is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Austria did not vote on the UDHR; Austria is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – while the Austrian government claims it does not mandate that religious organisations need to register with it, unregistered religious groups are confined to conducting their activities in private residences only. The Austrian registration system is structured vertically as registered religious organisations are divided into two categories: the higher category of “legally recognised churches and religious societies” and the lower category of “state-registered religious denominational communities.” The latter of the two categories has less obligations under the law but also less privileges. Religious organisations that do not qualify for either of these religious designations have the option to register under the secular designation of “associations.” To become eligible to register as a “legally recognised churches and religious society”, there are longevity and membership quotas to meet. For example, organisations must have existed in Austria for a period of at least twenty years “of which ten years must be in an organised form and at least five years must be as a confessional community” and must have a membership totalling at least 0.2% of Austria’s population according to the latest census. Religious societies are ‘public law corporations’ which gives them the ability to provide government-funded religious instruction in public and private schools, tax reliefs and exemptions from various charges such as for security at events and rubbish collection. To become eligible for the status of “state-registered religious denominational community”, a religious organisation must have at least 300 members and submit to the Office for Religious Affairs within the Federal Chancellery its statutes that must describe the goals, rights and obligations of members and membership regulations, a list of officials, and financing information. A group must also submit a written description of its religious doctrine, which must differ from that of any previously recognised religious society or denominational community. The Office for Religious Affairs determines whether the group’s basic beliefs are consistent with public security, order, health, and morals and with the rights and freedoms of citizens. All religious societies can request and receive government funding for pastoral care provided in prisons, hospitals, senior homes, and military installations with the amount of funding based on the size of the society’s membership. The government generally reviews and decides on each application submitted for confessional community status within six months. Religious societies, confessional communities, and religious associations all have authority to engage in such activities as purchasing real estate in their own name and contracting for goods and services, although confessional communities and religious associations are not eligible for the financial and educational benefits available to religious societies. Associations have legal status, the right to function in public, and many of the same rights as confessional communities. Associations may not offer pastoral care in hospitals or prisons, and contributions are not tax-deductible. Any group of more than two persons pursuing a nonprofit goal, faith-based or otherwise, may apply to the Ministry of Interior to obtain status as an association. Such group must submit a written statement citing its nonprofit goals and commitment to function as a nonprofit organisation. The government requires a visa for visitors from non-visa-exempt countries or individuals who would stay beyond 90 days, including religious workers of confessional communities or associations. Foreign religious workers of groups recognised as confessional communities or associations must apply for a general immigrant visa that is not employment or family based and is subject to a quota. Foreign religious workers belonging to religious societies also require immigrant visas but are exempt from the quota system. Religious workers from Schengen or EU-member countries are exempt from all visa requirements.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, longevity quotas, membership quotas, vertical registration system (verticalism), new religious groups are often barred from registering under a religious designation.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (not free; only registered organisations may perform pastoral care in prisons, hospitals, retirement homes and for members of the military); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Reform the vertical registration system to ensure greater equality among religions; remove any excessive requirements and assessments of religious doctrine (called content assessments); abolish longevity and membership quotas for registration.

Azerbaijan, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Azerbaijan is a hypersecular state that is actively hostile to all religion.

Protections: Explicit protection granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Azerbaijan is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Azerbaijan abstained on the UNDRIP; Azerbaijan did not vote on the UDHR; Azerbaijan is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the government of Azerbaijan mandates that all religious organisations, which are given the secular designation of “association” under the law, register with the State Committee on Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SCWRA) which can appeal to the national courts to suspend any religious group. Registration is tied to the physical building where the religious organisation is located which means any subsequent move or expansion of the organisation’s activities beyond the registered address necessitates reregistering with the SCWRA. Registration is necessary for a religious organisation to legally hold meetings, maintain a bank account in its name, rent property, act as a legal entity and receive funds from the government. To register, a religious organisation must submit to the SCWRA a notarised application signed by at least fifty members, a charter and founding documents, the names of the organisation’s founders, and the organisation’s legal address and bank information. The law requires the application to include information on the citizenship, place of residence, date of birth, and religious education, as well as copies of identity documents, of each of the 50 members. The application must include information on the history of the community; the forms and methods of its activities and traditions; its doctrine’s approach towards family, marriage, and education; and restrictions the community imposes on the rights and responsibilities of its members. By law, the government must rule on a registration application within thirty days, but there are no specified consequences if the government fails to act by the deadline. Authorities may deny registration of a religious organisation if its actions, goals, or religious doctrine contradict the constitution or other laws. Authorities may also deny registration if an organisation’s charter or other establishing documents contradict the law or if the information provided is false. Religious groups may appeal registration denials to the courts. The Caucasus Muslim Board (CMB) is registered by the SCWRA as a foundation. It monitors sermons and oversees other activities of registered Islamic organisations, including the training of clerics to lead Islamic worship and organising of pilgrimages to Mecca. Muslim communities must receive an approval letter from the CMB before submitting a registration application to the SCWRA. In 2022, amendments to the religious freedom law came into force that changed responsibility for appointing and removing religious leaders in all mosques in the country from the CMB to the SCWRA. The law bans activities by unregistered religious groups, punishable by fines or imprisonment. While the law prohibits government interference in the religious activities of any registered group or member of a registered group, there are exceptions for suspected extremist or other illegal activity. The law states government entities and citizens have rights and responsibilities to combat “religious extremism” and “radicalism.” The law specifies circumstances under which registered religious organisations may be dissolved, including if they act contrary to their founding objectives; cause racial, national, religious, or social animosity; or proselytise in a way that degrades human dignity or contradicts recognized principles of humanity such as “love for mankind, philanthropy, and kindness.” Other grounds for dissolution include hindering secular education or inducing members or other individuals to cede their property to the organisation. The law provides for some, but not all, registered religious groups to establish “religious centers” (headquarters) in the country. Smaller communities without a religious center are not allowed to apply for permission to have foreign citizens as religious leaders; establish religious educational establishments; organise visits by their adherents to shrines and religious locations abroad, or exercise other rights that are attributed only to religious centers. Mass religious worship, rites, and ceremonies (with some exceptions) may be held only in places of worship and shrines. SCWRA permission is required to hold religious “mass events” anywhere other than at state-approved places of worship or shrines. According to the law, the SCWRA reviews and approves all religious literature for content, legal importation, sale, and distribution. Punishments are proscribed by law for the production, sale, and distribution of religious literature (on paper and electronic devices), audio and video materials, religious items, and other informational materials of a religious nature without appropriate authorisation. Punishments for first-time offenders include a fine of between 5,000 and 7,000 manat (\$2,950–\$4,100), up to two years’ restricted freedom (probation), or up to two years’ imprisonment. Violations by a group of individuals “according to a prior conspiracy,” an organized group, an individual for a second time, or a government official carry a fine of between 7,000 and 9,000 manat (\$4,100–\$5,300), between two- and five-years’ restricted freedom, or a maximum of five years of imprisonment. The law prohibits proselytising by foreigners but does not prohibit citizens from doing so. In cases of proselytisation by foreigners or stateless persons, the law sets a punishment of one to two years in prison.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, baseless denials of registration, confinement, membership quota, reregistration, notarised signature quota, religious literature is reviewed by the government before importation and publication, significant leeway, weaponisation of terms, verticalism (‘religious centres’ occupy a higher status than ‘associations’), abuse of members of unregistered religious groups and fines levied against religious members meeting in private homes.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted; illegal for foreigners); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted with fines imposed); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Abolish the rule for mandatory registration; immediately stop retribution for unregistration; abolish restrictive reregistration, signature quota, membership quota, excessive informational requirements and confinement policies.

Bahamas, Commonwealth of The

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: The Bahamas is officially a secular state; however, state privilege is granted to Christianity, in particular the Bahamas Christian Council; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1973.

Protections: Explicit protection granted in law against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: The Bahamas is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; The Bahamas did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatory of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although the Bahamian government does not formally mandate that religious organisations register with it, religious organisations are required to register if they use any form of income to promote religion which is such a basic activity for religious organisations that registration is in effect mandatory. Individuals who fail to register face up to a 10 thousand dollar fine or up to one year in prison. Religious organisations must also register in order to purchase land in the organisation's name for the construction of places of worship. It is \$100 to register as a non-profit organisation. Registered religious organisations are subject to taxation laws and can receive certain tax exemptions. There are no distinct procedures for religious organisations as procedures are the same for non-profit organisations. The process of registration is called 'incorporation.' Groups are required to maintain a building for gathering to qualify for registration. The Bahamas Christian Council is composed of leaders of various Christian denominations and is in regular, direct contact with the government. Non-Christian groups (i.e. Jews, Rastafarians, Baha'is) are also given opportunities to consult the government.

Key restriction tools imposed: issue with the qualification that a religious group must maintain a building to become registrable, verticalism, prohibition of Obeah (those caught practicing Obeah or attempting to intimidate, steal, inflict disease, or restore a person's health through the practice of Obeah may face a sentence of three months in prison), prohibition of marijuana use including for religious rituals.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free); however, the government's continued prohibition of Obeah limits these freedoms only to religions except Obeah.

Recommendations

Abolish the stipulation that any use of income to promote religion necessitates registration as this causes a pseudo-mandatory policy; dissolve dormant laws (for example, those regarding blasphemy); establish separate systems for recognition and registration tailored to belief-based organisations rather than those that are used for secular entities; abolish the nationwide ban on Obeah.



Bahrain, Kingdom of



2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

ForB Claim: Partial claim is made based on sharia law as religious observance must not infringe on the “fundamental beliefs of Islamic doctrine.”

Secularity: Islam is the state religion; sharia is the principal source for legislation; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2017.

Protections: Explicit protection granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Bahrain is party to the ICCPR (although Bahrain made the reservation that it interprets the Covenant’s provisions relating to freedom of religion, family rights, and equality between men and women before the law as “not affecting in any way” the prescriptions of sharia), the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Bahrain did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory.**

Registration policy: broad-discriminatory mandatory registration – the Bahraini government mandates that all religious organisations register with it before conducting any activities in the country. However, there are three different registration procedures depending on the religion or denomination with which an organisation is affiliated. Islamic religious organisations must register with the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Endowments (MOJIA), specifically Sunni organisations with the Sunni Waqf within the MOJIA and Shia organisations with the Jaafari Waqf within the MOJIA. These endowment boards supervise, fund, and perform a variety of activities related to mosques and prayer halls. Non-Islamic religious organisations must register with and receive a licence from the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) as ‘civil society organisations.’ Hence, non-Islamic religious organisations are not recognised as religious entities under the law but instead under a secular designation as non-profit entities. To register, a group must submit an official letter requesting a license to operate; copies of minutes from the founders’ committee meeting; and a detailed list of founders and board members, including names, ages, nationalities, occupations, and addresses. It must also submit other information, such as the group’s bylaws, candidates who seek election to the organisation’s governing board, a physical address, and evidence of a bank account in a bank registered with the Central Bank of Bahrain. Religious groups also may need approval from the Ministry of Education (MOE) if the public education curriculum is involved; the Ministry of Information Affairs if the group intends to issue religious publications; or the Ministry of Interior (MOI), in coordination with the Central Bank of Bahrain, if the organisation receives funding from foreign sources. Individuals affiliated with Islamic organisations seeking to collect money for religious purposes must be Bahraini citizens and must receive approval from the MOJIA. The law prohibits activities falling outside an organisation’s charter. The penal code does not specifically address the activities of unregistered religious organisations but provides for the closing of any unlicensed branch of an international organisation plus imprisonment of up to six months and fines of up to 50 dinars (\$130) for the individuals responsible for setting up the branch. Although it is illegal for unregistered religious organisations to operate, in practice, the government often did not enforce this requirement. The SCIA oversees general Islamic religious activities taking place within the country as well as the publication of Islamic studies curricula and official religious texts. By law, the government regulates and monitors the collection of money by religious and other organizations. Islamic organizations wishing to collect money must first obtain authorisation from the MOJIA, which issues collection licenses valid for one year. Non-Islamic organizations must obtain authorisation from the MOSD. The period specified for collecting money should not exceed two months from the date of issuance of the license, with the exception of Islamic and charitable associations, where the period of collection is six months. A 2021 amendment to a royal decree requires the Sunni and Jaafari Waqfs to submit annual reports to the MOJIA on funds they collect for religious purposes, including for the construction or renovation of places of worship. The amendment also bans the waqfs from receiving money from abroad without MOJIA approval. The government licenses houses of worship. Permission for construction of a new mosque, whether Shia or Sunni, requires a government determination of the need for a new mosque in the area based on population. The government also determines the need for non-Islamic houses of worship. The King has sole legal authority to allocate public land, including for religious purposes, although he may delegate this authority to government officials. Citizens may also offer private land to build mosques. By law, construction of Islamic places of worship requires MOJIA approval. Non-Islamic groups must obtain MOSD approval. Municipal authorities provide final approval for construction. The law permits non-Islamic houses of worship to display crosses or other religious symbols outside their premises. The government does not designate religious affiliation on national identity documents, including birth certificates. Applications for birth certificates and national identity documents, however, record a child’s religion (Muslim, Christian, Jewish, or other), but not denomination. Hospital admission forms and school registration forms may also request information on an individual’s religion.

Key restriction tools imposed: confinement, different registration procedures exist for Islamic (Sunni and Shia groups register with different endowments), and non-Islamic groups, excessive informational requirements are requested as part of registration procedures that are likely to be used with nefarious intent, multi-registration is invoked, non-recognition, unregistration of any unlicensed branch of a group of foreign origin will result in the branch’s closure.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarcy** (not free; all non-Islamic religious materials are prohibited from importation); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; all non-Islamic religious literature is prohibited); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

A selection of minority groups have already received registration (though this should not be confused with the same recognition that Islam receives); abolish confinement, excessive informational requirements, and multi-registration policies; discontinue discriminatory registration procedures for Islamic and non-Islamic groups.

Bangladesh, People's Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Islam is the state religion despite the 2014 constitution also pledging to uphold secularism; Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism were also specifically named in the constitution as was the right to practice “other religions.”

Protections: Explicit protection granted in the 2014 constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Bangladesh is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC; Bangladesh abstained from the UNDRIP; Bangladesh did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: conditional registration – the government of Bangladesh allows religious organisations operating only one place of worship to conduct activities without needing to register; however, if a group operates or seeks to establish multiple places of worship, the government mandates that the organisation undergoes registration. Religious organisations register under the secular designation ‘non-governmental organisation’ either with the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) if the organisation intends to receive foreign assistance for development projects, or with the Ministry of Social Welfare if it does not require foreign funds. The NGOAB monitors all foreign funded projects. The NGOAB Director General has the authority to impose sanctions on NGOs for violating the law, including fines of up to three times the amount of the foreign donation, or closure of the NGO. Registration requirements and procedures for religious groups are the same as for secular associations. Organisations that register with the Ministry of Social Welfare must certify that the name being registered is not already taken. Organisations must also provide the bylaws/constitution of the organisation; confirmation of security clearances for leaders of the organization from the National Security Intelligence; minutes of the meeting appointing the executive committee; a list of all executive committee and general members and photographs of principal officers; a work plan; a copy of the deed or lease of the organisation’s office and a list of property owned; a budget; and a recommendation by a local government representative. Requirements for religious groups that register with the NGOAB are similar. To be legally recognised, Muslim marriages must be registered with the state by either the couple or the cleric performing the marriage; however, some Muslim marriages are not registered. Registration with the state of marriages for Hindus and Christians is optional and rare, and other faiths may determine their own guidelines.

Key restriction tools imposed: an impermissible qualification of a local government representative recommendation, borderline excessive informational requirements, nominal restriction, non-recognition, registration involves a secondary procedure.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (free); **pastoral services** (free); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Create a separate system and distinct procedures for registration of religious organisations from secular entities; establish one agency to deal with religious recognition and registration in order to processes; abolish borderline excessive informational requirements, excessive qualifications, nominal restriction and the involvement of a secondary procedure as part of the registration process.

Barbados

2024 RoRB Classification: **Apathetic**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made**

Secularity: Barbados is a secular state (the Church of England was disestablished in 1968); theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2007.

Protections: **Explicit protection granted in the 2007 constitution against discrimination on the basis of creed.**

Human rights instruments: Barbados is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Barbados did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious organisations operating in Barbados are not required to register with the government except if they wish to obtain duty-free import privileges and tax benefits. An applicant religious organisation must file the relevant customs and tax forms with the Corporate Affairs and Intellectual Property Office, along with a resolution passed by a majority of its board of trustees expressly authorising the application, plus the group's related statutory declaration (a legally binding document affirming that something is true to the best knowledge of the applicant and signed in the presence of a solicitor, commissioner for oaths, or notary public).

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, excessive registration fee for the registration of a society (\$750) that exceeds the \$100 threshold set down by RoRB standards.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); proselytism (free); private expression and observance (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a distinct system for existential recognition apart from legal registration; provide broader provisions within the legal registration framework beyond that of tax-exemption such as opportunities for state grants; abolish excessive registration fee.



Belarus, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.



Secularity: Belarus is officially a secular state; however, a concordat between the Belarusian government and the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC) grants the BOC rights and privileges not granted to other religions; the law recognises the historical importance of the “traditional faiths” Catholicism, Judaism, Islam and evangelical Lutheranism as well as the “determining role of the BOC.” The law does not consider as traditional faiths newer religious groups or older groups, such as the priestless Old Believers, Greek Catholics, and the Calvinist churches, which have roots in the country dating to the 17th century.

Human rights instruments: Belarus is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Belarus did not vote on the UDHR; Belarus is not party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Belarusian law prohibits all unregistered religious activity in the country punishable by up to two years in prison and mandates that religious organisations register to operate and obtain separate permits to proselytise and host events outside their registered premises in addition to prior approval from the authorities to import and distribute religious literature. The law establishes three tiers of registered religious groups: ‘religious communities’, ‘religious associations’, and ‘national religious associations.’ Religious communities must include at least twenty persons older than eighteen who live in one or several adjoining areas. Religious associations must include at least ten religious communities, and one of these communities must have been active in the country for at least twenty years. National-level religious associations may establish regional and local religious associations. National religious associations earn recognition only when they comprise active religious communities in at least four of the country’s six oblasts. To register, a religious community must submit an official application containing the following information: a list of its founders’ names, places of residence, citizenship, and signatures; copies of its founding statutes; the minutes of its founding meeting; and confirmation from regional authorities of the community’s right to occupy or use any property referenced in its founding statutes. A religious community not previously registered by authorities must also submit information regarding its beliefs. The law stipulates authorities may take up to six months to review a new registration application, which includes an evaluation of the religion by a state-appointed religious commission of experts. The commission evaluates the fundamental teachings of the religious group, as well as its rituals, practices, history, and forms and methods of activities; welfare and charitable services; proselytising and missionary activities; approaches toward marriage and family; educational activities; attitudes toward health care; and compliance with legal requirements. In addition, the community must submit any texts written by its founder or considered sacred by the followers of the religion, information concerning prohibitions on clergy or adherents, a list of countries where the religion is widely practiced, and a list of countries officially recognising the religious group. It also must submit information regarding countries that have refused to recognise the religion and information on court cases against its followers in other countries. Regional authorities, as well as Minsk city authorities or local municipal authorities (for groups outside of Minsk), review all registration applications. Permissible grounds for denial of registration include failure to comply with requirements for establishing a community, an inconsistent or fraudulent charter or other required document, violations of the procedures to establish religious organisations, and a negative evaluation by the state-appointed religious commission of experts. Communities may appeal refusals in court. To register as a religious association or national religious association, a group must provide an official application with a copy of the founding statutes, a list of members of the managing body with biographical information, proof of permission for the association to be at its designated location, and the minutes from its founding congress. Religious associations have the exclusive right to establish religious educational institutions and to organise cloistered and monastic communities. All applicants must submit forms to establish religious associations and national associations to OPRRNA, which has 30 days to respond. Grounds for refusal are the same as for religious communities, except they also include failure to comply with requirements for establishing an association rather than a community. Applicants may appeal in court refusals or a failure by OPRRNA to respond within the 30-day period. The law confines the activities of religious communities and associations to the jurisdictional area where they are registered. The law permits state agencies in charge of registration to issue written warnings to a registered religious group for violating any law or undertaking activities outside the scope of responsibilities in the group’s charter. Authorities may apply to a relevant court, depending upon jurisdiction, to shut down the group if it has not ceased the illegal activity outlined in the written warning within six months or if the activity is repeated within one year of the warning. Authorities may suspend activities of the religious group pending the court’s decision. The law does not contain a provision for appealing a warning or suspension. The housing code permits registered religious groups to hold services at residential premises if local authorities grant permission. Local authorities must certify that the premises comply with a number of regulations, including fire safety, sanitary, and health code requirements. Authorities do not grant such permission automatically, and the law prohibits religious groups from holding services in private residences without prior permission from local authorities, who may approve residential worship subject to revocation. By law, all religious groups must obtain permits to hold events outside of their premises, including when proselytising. The law penalises organising and participating in unauthorised gatherings, the announcement of an intention to hold a mass event before securing official authorisation, training protesters, financing public demonstrations, or soliciting foreign assistance “to the detriment” of the country. Included in the definition of “mass event” are religious events held in places not specifically intended for this purpose, whether outdoors or indoors. The law requires organisers to request permission from authorities to hold a mass event, including those involving religious groups, at least 15 days before the event. Some violations of the law prohibiting unauthorised mass events may be punishable by up to three years in prison. Authorities must inform organisers of a denial no later than five days before the event. In some cases, a first violation of the law within a year’s time involves an administrative penalty of a fine or detention up to 15 days, while if there is a second or further violation during that period the person may be imprisoned up to three years. Authorities have a system of reimbursements for security, medical, and cleaning services required from organisers of mass events, including religious events held outside of religious premises and sites, rallies, competitions, cultural events, festivals, concerts, and similar occasions. Authorities cover costs associated with events that are officially sponsored at the local and national levels. The law requires organisers to sign contracts for services before applying for a permit to hold a mass event and reimburse all costs within 10 days. The law requires all religious groups to obtain prior approval from authorities to import and distribute religious literature. The approval process includes official examination of the documents by state-appointed religious studies experts. The law permits only registered religious groups that are members of national religious associations to organise extracurricular religious activities at educational institutions. Only registered religious associations may apply to the Office of the Plenipotentiary Representative for Religious and Nationality Affairs (OPRRNA) for permission to invite foreign clergy to the country. OPRRNA must grant permission before foreign clergy may serve in local congregations, teach or study at local institutions, or participate in charitable work. Authorities generally grant such permission for a period of one year, and they may reduce or extend permissions. OPRRNA has 30 days to respond to requests for foreign clergy permits (religious visas) and may deny requests without explanation. If OPRRNA does not respond, it does not grant permission for a permit. There is no provision for appeals. By law, authorities permit foreign missionaries to engage in religious activity only in the territorial area where their religious association is registered. Transfers of foreign clergy within a religious association, including from one parish to another, require prior permission from authorities. By law, foreigners may not lead religious groups. Authorities may reprimand or expel foreign citizens who legally are present in the country for nonreligious work if they lead any religious activities. Law enforcement agencies on their own initiative or in response to recommendations from other state agencies, such as the security service, may require foreign clergy to depart the country – a decision that is beyond appeal.

Recognition policy: a concordat between authorities and the BOC provides the church with autonomy in its internal affairs, freedom to perform religious rites and other activities, and a special relationship with the state. The concordat recognises the BOC’s “influence on the formation of spiritual, cultural, and national traditions of the Belarusian people.” Although the concordat states that it does not limit the religious freedom of other religious groups, it calls for authorities and the BOC to combat unnamed “pseudo-religious structures that present a danger to individuals and society.” The BOC, unlike other religious communities, receives state subsidies pursuant to presidential orders. In addition, the BOC possesses the exclusive right to use the word “orthodox” in its title and to use as its symbol the double-barred image of the Cross of Saint Euphrosyne, the country’s Orthodox patron saint.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, baseless grounds of the denial of registration, confinement of registered groups, community quota, confinement, misuse of deregistration procedures, excessive informational requirements likely to be used with nefarious intent, geographic quota, membership quota, preapproval of basic religious activities, registration involves secondary procedures, unregistration fines, verticalism.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarcy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Disestablish and dismantle the abusive recognition and registration system so that a new one that is more receptive may take its place in order for Belarus to climb the Spectrum of Religious Recognition; dissolve mandatory registration and excessive requirements; exchange vertical recognition for horizontal; provide genuine legal registration and provide existential recognition; abolish the policy of confinement, community quotas, excessive informational requirements, membership quota, geographic quota, and the preapproval of basic religious activities.

Belgium, Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: Dynamic



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Belgium is a secular state; Anglicanism, Islam, Judaism, Greek and Russian Orthodox Christianity, Protestantism (including evangelicals and Pentecostals), Roman Catholicism and secular humanism are officially recognised by the Belgian government.

Protections: Explicit protection granted in law against discrimination on the basis of religious orientation.

Human rights instruments: Belgium is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Belgium voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – there are procedures for individual places of worship of recognised religious groups to apply to obtain registration and federal subsidies. To do so, a place of worship must meet requirements set by the region in which it is located and receive final approval by the federal Ministry of Justice. These requirements include transparency and legality of accounting practices, renunciation of foreign sources of income for ministers of religion working in the facility, compliance with building and fire safety codes, and certification of the minister of religion by the relevant interlocutor body. Recognised places of worship also receive subsidies from the linguistic communities and municipalities for the upkeep of religious buildings. Places of worship or other religious groups that are unable or choose not to meet these requirements may organise as nonprofit associations and benefit from lower taxes but not government subsidies. Individual houses of worship in this situation (i.e., not completing the recognition process) may still affiliate with an officially recognised religious group. The government requires all religious communities and places of worship to complete a four-year probation period prior to official recognition. This policy applies to all places of worship regardless of religion.

Recognition policy: the law does not define requirements to obtain official recognition. Instead, the Ministry of Justice, with Parliament's approval, specifies the legal basis for official recognition. A religious group seeking official recognition applies to the Ministry of Justice, which then recommends approval or rejection to parliament, which votes on the application. The government evaluates whether the group meets organisational and reporting requirements and applies criteria based on administrative and legislative precedents in deciding whether to recommend granting recognition to a religious group. The religious group must have a structure or hierarchy, a "sufficient number" of members, and a "long period" of existence in the country. It must offer "social value" to the public, abide by the laws of the state, and respect public order. The government does not formally define "sufficient number," "long period of time," or "social value." Final approval is the sole responsibility of the federal parliament; however, parliament generally accepts the ministry's recommendation. The law requires each officially recognised religious group to have an official interlocutor, such as an office composed of one or more representatives of the group plus administrative staff, to support the government in its constitutional duty of providing the material conditions for the free exercise of religion. The functions performed by the interlocutor include certification of clergy and teachers of the religion, assistance in the development of the religious curriculum in schools, and oversight of the management of houses of worship. The federal and regional governments provide financial support for officially recognised religious groups. Federal government subsidies include direct payment of clergy salaries and pensions, while regions subsidise maintenance and equipment costs for facilities and places of worship, as well as clergy housing, and oversee finances and donations in excess of €1,000 (\$1,100), as required by law. Denominations or divisions within the recognised religious groups (Shia Islam, Reform Judaism, or Lutheranism, for example) do not receive support or recognition separate from their parent religious group. Parent religious groups distribute subsidies according to their statutes, which may also include salaries to clergy and public funding for renovation or facility maintenance. Unrecognised religious groups have the same religious rights as recognised religious groups; the main difference is unrecognised groups do not receive public subsidies. The Belgian Buddhist Union receives a federal subsidy even though the government has not yet completed the final administrative step to officially recognise Buddhism. It is not illegal for religious organisations to receive foreign funding; however, recognised places of worship will lose recognition and government subsidies if their organisation receives foreign funding. Unrecognised places of worship have no funding restrictions, but if they wish to be recognised, they must renounce foreign funding.

Key restriction tools imposed: approval from at least two different government ministries is required for recognition (dual registration), inappropriately ambiguous qualifications (the law does not specify criteria for recognition), non-response to an application by the Belgian Hindu Forum made in 2013 to have Hinduism recognised as a religion, secondary procedures are involved in the registration process.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (not free; restrictions imposed on religious attire); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish an independent recognition agency to ensure that politicisation of decisions regarding registration and recognition does not occur; implement procedures that reduce reliance on legislative precedents and clarify any areas of policy that remain ambiguous; abolish secondary procedures of the registration process.

Belize

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Belize is officially a secular state; however, Christianity is privileged with the Belize Council of Churches and Belize Association of Evangelical Churches serving as part of the government-established People's Constitutional Commission; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2011.

Protections: Explicit protection granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Belize is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Belize did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the Belizean government mandates that all religious organisations register with the Companies Registry within the Ministry of the Attorney General in order to operate legally in the country and to conduct activities already protected under international law on FoRB. There is little distinction made between registered religious organisations and registered companies, especially with the introduction of a new law that interprets religious organisations as businesses. Registration allows a religious organisation to operate legally in the country; receive state recognition; negotiate, sue, and be sued; own property; hire employees; and lend or borrow money. A one-time registration fee of 295 Belize dollars (\$150) and a yearly fee of five Belize dollars (\$3). Requirements for registration include a memorandum of association with the government delineating the group's objective and mission, an article of association, and a letter from the Central Bank if the organisation has foreign financial contributors. The government has the legal ability to shut down the facilities of religious organisations that do not register. The government does not levy property taxes on churches or other places of worship. Other religious group owned buildings occupied on a regular basis, such as clergy residences, are not tax-exempt. Individual places of worship may apply for non-governmental organisation status, which makes them exempt from paying income tax, business tax, and any other government-levied tax or duty. Places of worship are not entitled to government-provided cash subventions (grants). To enter the country and proselytise, foreign religious workers require a multiple-entry visa that costs 100 Belize dollars (\$50) and is valid for one year. Applicants must also purchase a religious worker's permit that costs 50 Belize dollars (\$25) and is renewable annually. Visa applications request information on an applicant's intended length of stay, location of service, availability of funding for their activity, and specific purpose. Members of all religious groups are eligible to obtain visas. While a group does not need to be locally registered, a recommendation by a locally registered religious group lends more credibility to the visa request, according to local authorities.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, excessive registration fee, administering property is a basic religious activity so to make it a registrable activity is impermissible to RoRB standards, unregistration may lead to a group's forced closure; a new law on non-governmental organisations will apparently treat religious organisations as businesses and will hamper the humanitarian work conducted by religious organisations.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (not free; restricted); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Reverse the new law that interprets and treats religious organisations as businesses; greater distinction needs to be made between registration processes for religious entities and secular entities; abolish excessive registration fee and the rule that administering a property is made subject to registration as well as the rules around unregistration leading to the forced closure of groups by the government.



Benin, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Benin is a secular state; theism is affirmed in the presidential oath.

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in law against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Benin is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Benin did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatory of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the government of Benin mandates that all religious organisations register with the Ministry of Interior in order to operate legally in the country. Registration requirements include submitting administrative materials (including the applicant's birth certificate, police record, a request letter, copy of identification, and the group's internal rules) and payment of a registration fee of 50,000 CFA francs (\$85). The ministry may close the religious facilities of unregistered groups until they register. Government officials at the department and municipal levels have the authority to issue orders suspending certain types of religious practice to maintain peace.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, arbitrary enforcement, borderline excessive informational requirements, unregistration may lead to the closure of groups.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Abolish borderline excessive informational requirements and the stringent rules around unregistration used as the basis for the forced closure of religious groups; establish separate procedures for the registration of belief-based organisations and the recognition of belief systems themselves.

Bhutan, Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Vajrayana Buddhism is the state denomination; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2008; Buddhism's "spiritual heritage" in the country was also recognised in the 2008 constitution and demands that the king is Buddhist.

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of faith.

Human rights instruments: Bhutan is party to the UNCRC; Bhutan abstained from the UNDRIP; Bhutan is not party to the ICCPR or the ICESCR; Bhutan did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Bhutanese law mandates that all religious organisations register with the Commission for Religious Organizations (CRO). Unregistered religious organisations can worship in private but are not permitted to organise publicly, own property, raise funds, conduct outreach activities, or import literature. Penalties for unregistered organisations performing these activities range from fines to prison terms, depending on the offense. The law states it is an offense for a religious group to provide false or misleading information in its religious teachings, to misuse investments, or to raise funds illegally. To register, a religious organisation must submit an application demonstrating its leaders are citizens of the country and disclosing their educational backgrounds and financial assets. The law also specifies the organisational structure, bylaws, and procedural rules for registered religious organisations. It prohibits religious organisations from "violating the spiritual heritage" of the country and requires them to protect and promote it. The law also states no religious organisation shall do anything to impair the sovereignty, security, unity, or territorial integrity of the country. It mandates that the CRO certify religious groups applying for registration meet the specified requirements. The CRO has the authority to determine whether a group has raised funds illegally. Sanctions include fines and potential revocation of registration. Registered religious organisations may raise funds for religious activities and are exempt from taxes. Registered groups require approval from local government authorities to hold public meetings outside of their registered facilities and must seek approval from the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs to invite foreign speakers or receive foreign funds. The CRO has the authority to determine whether the content of an organisation's religious teachings is false or misleading and whether it has raised funds illegally. The law states the CRO shall consist of an eight-member board responsible for overseeing the structure of religious institutions, enforcing the constitutional separation between the government and religious organisations, and monitoring religious fundraising activities. The chairperson of the board is a cabinet minister appointed by the Prime Minister. A senior official from the Ministry of Finance and one of the King's appointees to the National Council also sit on the board. The director of culture in the Ministry of Home Affairs serves ex officio as secretary. Heads of Buddhist religious organisations and the Hindu Dharma Samudaya, a registered Hindu organisation, occupy the remaining seats. There are no set term limits for the CRO. The law requires the CRO to "ensure that religious institutions and personalities promote the spiritual heritage of the country" by developing a society "rooted in Buddhist ethos." The constitution states the King shall appoint the chief abbot of the country's Central Monastic Body (CMB), on the advice of the five masters of the Buddhist monastic body. Those individuals and a civil servant administrative secretary make up the Commission for Monastic Affairs, which manages issues related to Buddhist doctrine. There are no set term limits for the CMB. The constitution directs the state to provide funds and "facilities" to the CMB. The law permits the government to "avoid breaches of the peace" by requiring licenses for public assembly, prohibiting assembly in designated areas, and imposing curfews. The government may apply these measures to groups and organisations of all kinds, including religious groups.

Key restriction tools imposed: confinement, lack of information about registered groups, non-recognition for any non-Buddhist religion, non-response to applications, preapproval, qualifications stipulated place limits on groups of foreign origin, religious buildings must conform to traditional architecture and be approved by the government prior to construction, the CRO has the authority to determine the legitimacy of a religion's teachings, the King must be a Buddhist, unregistered groups are prohibited from conducting some basic religious activities.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hieronymy** (not free; illegal for unregistered groups for propagational use); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Abolish the policy of confinement, government preapproval, excessive qualifications and the rules around unregistration; dissolve aspects of the recognition system that have been established to restrict registration; establish a more receptive approach towards non-Buddhist denominations.



Bolivia, Plurinational State of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Bolivia is officially a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 2009); however, the Roman Catholic Church receives privileges not granted to other religious organisations by way of a concordat between the Holy See and the Bolivian government which exempts the Church from having to undergo registration; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2009.

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Bolivia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Bolivia voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – religious organisations must register with the Office of Religion and Nongovernmental Organisations within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the process results in an "operating licence." The law makes a clear distinction between religious organisations as belief-based and as representing a community of adherents and secular non-governmental organisations. The religious freedom law requires all religious or spiritual organisations to inform the government of all financial, legal, social, and religious activities. The law regulates religious or spiritual organizations' finances and labor practices by requiring they use funds exclusively to achieve the organisation's objectives, banning the distribution of money among members, subjecting all employees to national labor laws and compelling religious organisations to pay taxes. Religious organisations must meet 14 documentary requirements to register with the government. These include submitting notarised legal documents, including the organisation's statutes, internal regulations, and procedures; rental agreement documents, utility invoices, and a site map for the place(s) of worship; detailed information on board members and legal representatives, including criminal background checks; INTERPOL certificates for foreigners; proof of fiscal solvency; a leadership organisation chart, with names, addresses, identification card numbers, and photographs; a full list of members and identifying information; details on activities and services provided by the organisation, including the location of the services; and information on their financing source(s), domestic and foreign. The requirements for classification as a spiritual or religious organisation vary slightly, but the government requires essentially the same type of information from both. The constitution defines a spiritual organisation as a group of natural, national, and/or foreign persons who organise themselves to carry out practices that develop their spirituality according to their ancestral worldview. Most spiritual organisations are indigenous in their origins. The constitution defines a religious organisation as a group of natural, national, and/or foreign persons who organise themselves with the purpose of carrying out practices of worship and/or belief around a Supreme Being to develop their spirituality and religiosity. Religious and spiritual organisations must be nonprofit. The government may revoke a spiritual or religious organisation's operating license for noncompliance with the registration requirements if the organisation does not produce an annual report of activities for more than two consecutive years; does not comply with its stated objectives; carries out activities different from those established in its statutes; or carries out activities contrary to the country's constitution, laws, morality, or "good customs." A religious or spiritual organisation may also lose its operating license if it does not comply with the deadline for renewing the license. The government may not deny legal recognition to any organisation based on its articles of faith. The fee to obtain an operating license as a religious organisation is 6,780 bolivianos (\$990). The fee for a spiritual organisation is 4,068 bolivianos (\$600). Although the government does not provide an official explanation for the difference in these licensing fees, government officials say spiritual organisations are charged less because they are smaller than religious organisations.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, broad reservations to deregister, deregistration procedures are stringent and their grounds ambiguous making groups vulnerable to baseless deregistrations, excessive informational requirements, excessive registration fees, mandatory notification of the state of all financial, legal, social and religious activities, re-registration, state definition of religion.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Dissolve excessive requirements for registration and subjective legislation that could be used for purposes of restriction; lower fees for registration; Bolivia's fees are significantly higher than the majority of other country's registration fees for the same process; dismantle restrictive policies and procedures in order to become more receptive; develop procedures for existential recognition and abolish the practice of state definition of religion.

Bosnia and Herzegovina



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Bosnia and Herzegovina is officially a secular state; however, the latest constitution from 1992 of the entity Republika Srpska recognises the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) as “the Church of the Serb people and other people of Orthodox religion”; the law also recognises four “traditional” religious communities including the Islamic Community, the SOC, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Jewish community

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in the constitutions of both entities the Federation of BiH and the Republika Srpska against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Bosnia and Herzegovina is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Bosnia and Herzegovina did not vote on the UDHR; Bosnia and Herzegovina is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina does not explicitly mandate that religious organisations register to operate legally, religious organisations cannot conduct collaborative actions such as charity work, fundraising, and constructing and occupying places of worship without registering which are activities so fundamental religious organisations that registration in effect becomes mandatory. The law on religion states that churches and religious communities serve as representative institutions and organisations of believers, founded in accordance with their own regulations, teachings, beliefs, traditions, and practices. The Ministry of Justice maintains a unified register of all religious communities. To acquire official status as a recognised religious community, religious groups must register. The constitutions of BiH, the Federation entity, and the RS entity state that registered religious organisations are allowed to operate freely. According to law, any group of 300 or more adult citizens may apply to register a new religious community (defined as non-Christian) or church through a written application to the Ministry of Justice. Requirements for registration include an application attaching religious statutes that define the method of religious practice and a petition for establishment with the signatures of at least 30 founders. The ministry must issue a decision within 30 days of receipt of the application. The law stipulates the ministry may deny the application if it concludes the content and manner of worship may be “contrary to legal order, public morale, or is damaging to the life and health or other rights and freedoms of believers and citizens.” A group may appeal a negative decision to the national-level Council of Ministers. The law allows registered religious communities to establish their own sub-organisations, which may operate without restriction. The law states that no new church or religious community may be founded bearing the same or similar name as an existing church or religious community. The law also states no one may use the symbols, insignia, or attributes of a church or religious community without its consent. Unregistered religious groups may assemble to practice their religion, but they have no legal status and may not represent themselves as a religious community. In addition to registered churches and religious communities, there are educational, charitable, and other institutions, known as “legal subjects,” that belong to these communities but are registered as separate legal entities in the Ministry of Justice registry. The Islamic Community has 121 legal subjects, the Catholic Church 404, the Orthodox Church 550, the Jewish community eight, and other churches and religious communities and alliances (primarily Protestant groups) have 50. The law on religion states that churches and religious communities must pay taxes and contributions on earnings of their employees (pension, health, and disability insurance). There is no uniform system for providing pensions and health benefits for religious officials, as the Federation and the RS manage their own systems. In the Federation, all 10 cantons generally include religious officials in their health insurance systems, but the systems vary from canton to canton. For example, Sarajevo Canton does not include religious workers in its health insurance system but offers such insurance to religious officials under more favorable terms than those available to other citizens. In the RS, pension benefits and disability insurance are provided to SOC religious workers who live there.

Recognition policy: the law recognises the legal status of four “traditional” religious communities: the Islamic Community (the representative organisation of the country’s Muslim community), SOC, the Catholic Church, and the Jewish community. Each group operates under its own formal or informal governing principles, including designations of persons in leadership at various levels and within various jurisdictions who speak officially on behalf of the group. The government recognises the Islamic Community as the sole, supreme institutional religious authority for all Muslims in the country, including immigrants and refugees, as well as for Bosniaks and other Muslim nationals living outside the country who accept the Islamic Community’s authority. According to the law, no Islamic group may register with the Ministry of Justice or open a mosque without the permission of the Islamic Community.

Key restriction tools imposed: ambiguous grounds for the denial of registration are vulnerable to misuse, membership quota, nominal restriction, non-recognition for untraditional or alternative belief systems, signature quota, verticalism.

Basic religious activities

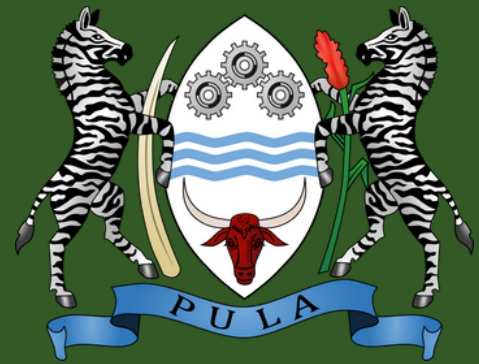
Conversion (free); **hierocny** (free); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (free); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (free); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (free); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Dissolve intrusive registration requirements to reach receptivity; remove vertical recognition; establish an equitable recognition system; abolish the imposition of a membership quota, nominal restriction, signature and the policy of non-recognition for untraditional religious groups.

Botswana, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Botswana is officially a secular state; however, state privilege for Christianity is shown through the influence of the Botswana Council of Churches (BCC) to affect law and policy.

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of creed.

Human rights instruments: Botswana is partied to the ICCPR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Botswana is not partied to the ICESCR; Botswana did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the government of Botswana mandates that all organisations, including religious organisations, must register with the Registrar of Societies within the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs to operate legally in the country, including the ability to conduct business, sign contracts and open a local bank account. However, the law discriminates by stipulating that religious organisations affiliated with a new religion not previously registered must have a minimum of 150 members to register while those affiliated with a religion previously registered need only ten members to register. Any person who manages, assists in the management of, or holds an official position in an unregistered group is subject to a fine of up to 1,000 pula (\$76) and up to seven years in prison. Individuals who are not in leadership positions in unregistered groups are subject to lower penalties, including fines up to 500 pula (\$38) and up to three years in prison. The Societies Act, amended in 2022 to curb money laundering, requires all societies, including registered religious groups, to reregister with the Registrar of Societies. It also mandates qualification criteria for the officers of registered societies, including pastors, who are required to possess theology certification from a “reputable institution” to ensure that they are qualified to perform their functions.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, fines and imprisonment will be levied against unregistered groups, insufficient clarity on informational requirements for the registration process, membership quota, the government continues to pursue court cases against unregistered religious organisations that the government claimed were coming into the country to “take advantage of” local citizens by demanding tithes and donations for routine services or special prayers; the 2022 Societies Act has been criticised for not sufficiently distinguishing religious organisations from businesses and civil associations.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieroncy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (free); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Dissolve the retribution of fines and imprisonments for unregistration in order to move towards greater receptivity; provide more sophisticated procedures for registration and recognition in differentiated capacities; provide greater support to encourage religious and belief-based organisations and communities to establish in order to move to the classification of dynamism; abolish the imposition of a membership quota.

Brazil, Federative Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: **Receptive**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Brazil is a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1890); theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2017.

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Brazil is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Brazil voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – the Brazilian government only requests that religious organisations register to obtain tax-exempt status but unregistered religious organisations can establish places of worship, train clergy and proselytise. Religious organisations seeking tax-exempt status have to register with both the Federal Revenue Office and the local municipality in which they operate. States and municipalities have different requirements and regulations for obtaining tax-exempt status. Most jurisdictions require organisations to document the purpose of their congregation, provide an accounting of finances, and have a fire inspection of any place of worship. Local zoning laws and noise ordinances may limit where a religious group may build houses of worship or hold ceremonies. A constitutional provision provides the right of access to religious services and counsel to individuals of all religions in all civil and military establishments. The law states public and private hospitals as well as civil or military prisons must comply with this provision.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, localisation of tax-exempt status procedures.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Differentiation needs to be made between existential recognition and legal registration and there needs to be procedures set in place to ensure sufficient bestowal of these two separate forms of recognition; establish an independent recognition agency to handle dynamically the vast diversity of beliefs and practices found in the country so that sufficient degrees of existential recognition and legal registration are bestowed; rearrange segmented structure for registration.

Brunei

Darussalam



2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

ForB Claim: Partial claim is made based on sharia-compliant reservations.

Secularity: Shafi'i Sunni Islam is the state denomination which is the latest constitution from 2006 stated the Sultan is the head of; the official national ideology is Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB), a system combining Malay nationalism with Islam and monarchism that the government actively promotes; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance; the constitution requires all cabinet ministers to be of Malay ethnicity and Muslim.

Human rights instruments: Brunei is party to the UNCRC and the UNDRIP; Brunei is not party to the ICCPR or the ICESCR; Brunei did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Bruneian law mandates that all religious organisations register with the Registrar of Societies within the Ministry of Home Affairs in order to operate legally in the country. The Registrar of Societies has the discretion in law to deny a registration application for any reason. To become an approved religious organisations, background checks are conducted on the organisation's leaders and board members. Applicant organisations are also subject to naming requirements. Registered organisations must furnish any updated information on leadership, election of officers, members, assets, activities, and any other information the registrar requests. Benefits of registration include the ability to operate, reserve space in public buildings, and apply for authorisation to raise funds. Organisations are prohibited from affiliation with any entity outside the country without prior written approval by the registrar. Unregistered organisations may face charges of unlawful assembly and may be subject to fines. Individuals who participate in or influence others to join unregistered organisations may be fined, arrested, and imprisoned. The penalty for violating laws on the registration and activity of organisations is a fine of up to 10,000 Brunei dollars (\$7,600), imprisonment for up to three years, or both. The law states any public assembly of five or more persons requires official approval in advance. Under emergency powers, this applies to all forms of public assembly, including religious assembly. In practice, however, places of worship are viewed as private places in which gatherings do not require approval. The law prohibits the teaching or promotion of any religion other than Islam to Muslims or to persons of no faith. Under the SPC, the penalty for propagating religions other than Islam is up to five years in prison, a fine of up to 20,000 Brunei dollars (\$15,200), or both. The sharia penal code (SPC) includes a provision that makes it illegal to criticise Islam as well as the SPC itself. The SPC includes provisions barring contempt for or insult of the Sultan, the administration of sharia, or any law related to Islam. SPC sections provide, in certain circumstances, for death sentences for apostasy from Islam, deriding Islamic scriptures, and declaring oneself as God, among other offences. Laws and regulations limit access to religious literature. The law states it is an offense for a person to import any publication deemed objectionable, which is defined in part as describing, depicting, or expressing matters of race or religion in a manner likely to cause "feelings of enmity, hatred, ill will, or hostility between different racial or religious groups." The law also bans distributing non-Islamic religious materials to Muslims or persons of no faith. All religious texts are listed as restricted items for import and require a government import permit before shipment. The SPC prohibits publication or importation of published materials giving instruction about Islam with content contrary to sharia. It also bars the distribution to Muslims or to persons with no religion of publications related to religions other than Islam. The SPC bars the publication, broadcast, or public expression of a list of words generally associated with Islam (such as the Quran) in a non-Islamic context.

Key restriction tools imposed: arbitrary requirements during registration procedures, baseless grounds of the denial of registration, excessive informational requirements, nominal restriction, non-recognition of all non-Sunni groups, state preapproval of religious activities, unregistration is illegal, nationwide prohibition continues of what the government labels "deviant" groups including Ahmadiyya, Baha'i Faith and Jehovah's Witnesses and the sharia penal code also bans most non-Sunni forms of Islam as well as any practice or display of "black magic."

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hieronymy** (not free; restricted to Islamic religious materials only); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; illegal); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; illegal to distribute non-Islamic religious materials); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Abolish the mandatory registration law and arbitrary requirements for registered status; dismantlement of the current abusive recognition system; dissolve excessive informational requirements, nominal restrictions, non-recognition of all non-Sunni groups, state preapproval of activities and the criminalisation of unregistration.

Bulgaria, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Bulgaria is officially a secular state (the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was disestablished in 1946); however, Eastern Orthodox Christianity was recognised in as Bulgaria's "traditional religion" in the constitution last revised in 2015; in particular, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) is recognised as the national church and receives privileges not granted to other religious organisations such as its exemption from having to register to continue receiving benefits.

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Bulgaria is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Bulgaria did not vote on the UDHR; Bulgaria is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Bulgarian law only requests that religious organisations register with the Sofia City Court if they wish to receive financial and legal benefits including tax-exempt status. The end result of registration the law calls "national legal recognition." Applications must include the organisation's name and official address; a description of the organisation's religious beliefs and service practices, its organisational structure, management procedures, bodies, and mandates; a list of official representatives and the processes for their election; procedures for convening meetings and making decisions; and information on finances, property, and processes for termination and liquidation of the group. The Directorate for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers provides expert opinions on registration matters upon the court's request. Applicants must notify the Directorate for Religious Affairs within seven days of receiving a court decision on their registration. Applicants may appeal negative registration decisions to the Sofia Appellate Court and, subsequently, the Supreme Cassation Court, the country's highest court. The law does not require the formal registration of local branches of registered groups with the local court, only that branches notify local authorities and local authorities enter them in a register. The law prohibits registration of different groups with the same name in the same location. The Directorate for Religious Affairs and any prosecutor may request that a court revoke a religious organisation's registration on the grounds of systematic violations of the law. As of year's end, there were 228 registered religious groups in addition to the BOC. Registered religious groups must maintain a registry of all their clergy and employees, provide the Directorate for Religious Affairs with access to the registry, and issue a certificate to each clergy member, who must carry it as proof of representing the group. Foreign members of registered religious groups may obtain long-term residency permits, but for the foreign member to be allowed to conduct religious services during his or her stay, the group must send advance notice to the Directorate for Religious Affairs. The law requires the government to provide funding for all registered religious groups based on the number of self-identified followers in the latest census at a rate of 10 leva (\$6) per capita to groups that comprise more than 1 percent of the population and varying amounts for the rest. Registered groups have the right to perform religious services; maintain financial accounts; own property such as houses of worship and cemeteries; provide medical, social, and educational services; receive property tax and other exemptions; and participate in commercial ventures. The law allows registered groups to publish, import, and distribute religious media; it does not address the rights of unregistered groups regarding such media. National law does not restrict religious practice by unregistered religious groups, but these groups lack privileges that the law grants to registered groups, such as access to government funding and the right to own property, establish financial accounts in their names, operate schools and hospitals and burial grounds, receive property tax exemptions, and sell religious merchandise. The law does not restrict proselytising by registered or unregistered groups. Some local ordinances, however, place restrictions on certain activities of religious groups. Some municipalities, including Kyustendil, Maritsa, Pleven, Razgrad, Sliven, and Varna, prohibit unregistered religious groups from conducting any religious activities. Ordinances in Kyustendil, Maritsa, Pleven, and Shumen prohibit door-to-door proselytising, while in Kyustendil and Maritsa, ordinances restrict religious agitation on the street and the distribution of religious literature without a permit. The ordinance in Kyustendil remains in effect despite a 2018 Supreme Administrative Court ruling that it was unconstitutional. Burgas municipality prohibits the wearing of unregistered religious groups' religious dress and symbols. Some municipalities prohibit religious activities inside cultural institutes, schools, and establishments for youth and children.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, excessive informational requirements, mandatory notification imposed onto local branches, non-recognition of any denomination other than the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, unregistered groups may not conduct some "basic religious activities".

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (free); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (free); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Remove some of the cited excessive informational requirements; abolish the mandatory notification policy and the non-recognition policy of any denomination other than the BOC; establish procedures for existential recognition.

Burkina Faso

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Burkina Faso is a secular state.

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Burkina Faso is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Burkina Faso did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional and malregistration.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – the government of Burkina Faso does not mandate religious organisations register in order to operate legally in the country. However, religious organisations must register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization, and Security (MATDS) to obtain legal recognition by the government. However, registered religious organisations are subject to regulations imposed on all registered organisations or be subject to a fine of 50,000 to 150,000 CFA francs (\$85 to \$255). The government taxes religious groups if they engage in commercial activities, such as farming or dairy production, but not all mosques, churches that engage in these activities are taxed, despite a 2022 decision by the Organisation for the Harmonisation of Business Law in Africa, to which the country belongs, that member governments do so. The registration process usually takes three to four weeks and costs less than 50,000 CFA francs (\$85). The Directorate General for Religious, Customary, and Traditional Affairs (DGARCT), established by MATDS in May 2023, coordinates the ministry's activities related to religion. The new directorate has the stated aim to promote and foster inter-religious dialogue and peace; eliminate radicalisation and religious extremism; develop and implement measures for the construction of places of worship and the registration of religious organisations and religious congregations; and monitor the implementation of standards for burial, exhumation, and transfer of remains (which may include religious elements). Religious groups operate under the same regulatory framework for publishing and broadcasting as other entities. MATDS may request copies of proposed publications and broadcasts to verify they are in accordance with the nature of the religious group as stated in its registration. MATDS also reviews permit applications by religious groups.

Malregistration – the ongoing Islamist insurgency means the central government may not have the ability to enforce its registration laws throughout the territory it claims.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, borderline excessive monitorial requirements, excessive authority granted to the MATD, possible use of impermissible basis for the denial of registration or deregistration by the government's use of "moral" grounds as the reason for such actions.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (unclear); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

To achieve dynamic status, an independent recognition agency needs to be established to monitor and guide religious recognition activity and its meaningful impact; dissolve borderline excessive informational requirements and ensure that separate procedures exist for legal registration and existential recognition to resolve this issue of amalgamation.



Burundi, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Burundi is a secular state; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2018.

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Burundi is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Burundi abstained from the UNDRIP; Burundi did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatory registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the Burundian government mandates that all religious organisations register with the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to operate legally in the country and for official government recognition. To register, religious organisations must state the belief system or denomination it affiliates with, a copy of its bylaws, a local headquarters address as well as a foreign address if the group is headquartered abroad, and the names and addresses of the group's governing body and legal representative. The law further requires each religious group's facilities meet construction and sanitation requirements and prohibits religious groups from undertaking religious activities during work hours unless authorised by the MOI. Additionally, all religious groups must carry out an economic or social project, such as establishing a school or health center. All religious groups are required to file an annual report on their activities, which an MOI team monitors. The law prohibits individuals, either independently or within religious denominations, from professing themselves to be God. The law also prohibits the promotion of atheism. According to the law, all legal representatives for religious groups must be Burundian citizens, at least 30 years old, and hold at minimum a bachelor's degree. The law mandates terms within organisations' governing bodies be limited to five years, renewable by democratic elections. The law also gives the MOI the right to organize elections should religious leaders fail to do so at term's end. Any religious group headquartered outside the country must also sign a framework agreement with the government and ensure traceability of all foreign funding by opening foreign currency accounts at the central bank and providing proof of origin of foreign funding in order to access those accounts. The law regulating religious groups provides several additional registration requirements, including respect for the environment, hygiene standards, public order, adherence to guidelines mandating certain distances between places of worship, and avoidance of noise pollution. Any independent religious group based in-country filing for registration must have a minimum of 300 members. Foreign-based religious groups seeking to establish an in-country presence must have at least 500 members to qualify. The law prohibits foreign citizens from being members of executive and decision-making bodies for religious groups at the national level. The MOI provisionally grants legal status for up to two years while registration approval is pending. The law on religious groups does not provide broad tax exemptions or other benefits; however, the financial laws exempt from tax those goods imported by religious groups if the groups can demonstrate importation of the goods is in the public interest. Some religious schools have agreements with the government entitling them to tax exemptions when investing in infrastructure or purchasing school equipment and educational materials. The MOI usually processes registration requests in two to four weeks. Leaders, administrators, or adherents of religious groups who continue to practice after registration is denied, or after the dissolution or suspension of a previously approved registration, are subject to six months to five years of imprisonment, a fine, or both.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, discrimination of new, independent and foreign religious groups through the imposition of separate regulations, excessive monitorial requirements, imprisonment of members, staff and leaders of religious groups who continue to practice after registration denial, membership quotas, the law prohibits promoting atheism.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

End membership quotas and other unnecessary registration requirements; end the cited retributions; halt government involvement in the internal affairs of religious bodies and halt government monitoring of religious activity; reverse laws restricting on religious activity; revoke the mandatory registration policy; take a more receptive approach to non-traditional religious and belief groups.



Cabo Verde, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.



Secularity: Cabo Verde is officially a secular state; however, a concordat with the Cabo Verdean government grants the Roman Catholic Church privileges that are not given to other religious organisations, including the recognition of Catholic marriages under civil law and the Church's legal status.

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Cabo Verde is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Cabo Verde did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the government of Cabo Verde mandates that all associations, including religious organisations, register with the Ministry of Justice. However, to begin any activities related to “developing their presence in the country” (a stipulation which is vague and may be arbitrarily enforced), religious organisations must gain the notarised signatures of 500 members in order to access registration which locks new religious groups out of the legal status to operate. To register, a religious organisation must submit a copy of its charter and statutes signed by its members. Registered religious groups may receive exemptions from taxes and fees in connection with places of worship or other buildings intended for religious purposes, activities with exclusively religious purposes, institutions and seminaries intended for religious education or training of religious leaders, goods purchased for religious purposes, and distribution of publications with information on places of worship. Unregistered organisations may conduct the same activities to the extent permitted under the law but are not eligible for tax benefits. Legally registered churches and religious groups may use broadcast time on public radio and television at their own expense. Failure to present the required signatures prevents religious groups from completing their formal registration process and obtaining tax-exempt status and protections for their property and presence in the country. According to the law, registered churches and religious communities or organisations may apply for and obtain authorisation to provide moral and religious education in public schools.

Recognition policy: a concordat between the government and the Holy See recognises the legal status of the Catholic Church and its right to carry out its apostolic mission freely in the country. The concordat further recognises Catholic marriages under civil law and the right of Catholics to carry out religious observances on Sundays, and it specifies a number of Catholic holidays as public holidays. It protects places of worship and other Catholic properties and provides for religious educational institutions, charitable activities, and pastoral work in the military, hospitals, and penal institutions. The concordat exempts church revenues and properties used in religious and nonprofit activities from taxes and makes contributions to the church tax deductible.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, arbitrary enforcement, issue with making registration a prerequisite for a religious group's access to broadcasting time, signature quota.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that has the capacity to bestow both existential recognition and legal registration; remove subjective wording from the legislation in order to ensure that misuse of the legislation does not occur; revoke all restrictive policies and requirements that are inappropriate to standards of freedom of religion or belief; abolish the law stipulating a 500 signature quota to access registration.

Cambodia, Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Buddhism is the state religion according to the latest constitution revised in 2008.

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Cambodia is party to the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Cambodia filed an instrument of accession to the ICCPR but did not ratify; Cambodia did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: quasi-mandatory registration – although Cambodian law mandates that all religious organisations, including Buddhist organisations, must register with the Ministry of Cults and Religions (MCR) before conducting any activities in the country, there are no penalties for religious organisations that fail to register. Applicant religious organisations must inform the government of their goals, describe their activities, provide biographical information for all religious leaders, identify their funding sources, submit annual reports detailing all activities and refrain from insulting other religious groups, fomenting disputes, or undermining national security. Registration requires approval from numerous local, provincial, and national government offices, a process that can take up to 90 days. Religious organisations that do not register may not receive an income tax exemption from the Ministry of Economy and Finance. The law also forbids religious organisations from organising events, rallies, meetings, and training sessions that are politically focused. The law does not authorise a religious entity to hold title to land, which compels religious leaders to register land in their personal capacity rather than that of their organisation. The law requires separate registration of all places of worship and religious schools. Authorities may temporarily close unregistered places of worship and religious schools until they are registered. The law also distinguishes between “places of worship” and “offices of prayer.” The establishment of a place of worship requires that an individual, not a religious organisation, own both the structure and the land on which it is located. The facility must have a minimum capacity of 200 persons, and the permit application requires the support of at least 100 congregants. An office of prayer may be in a rented location and has no minimum capacity requirement. The permit application for an office of prayer requires the support of at least 25 congregants. Places of worship must be located at least two kilometres (1.2 miles) from each other and may not be used for political purposes or to house criminals or fugitives. This distance requirement applies only to the construction of new places of worship and not to offices of religious organisations or offices of prayer. Schools that focus on religious studies must be registered with the MCR and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MOEYS). There is no visa category specifically applicable to religious workers. Foreigners working in a religious institution must qualify for and obtain a Type C visa, which allows for a three month stay, and work permit.

Recognition policy: the law bans non-Buddhist groups from proselytising publicly and stipulates that non-Buddhist literature may be distributed only inside a related religious institution. The law also prohibits offers of money or materials to persuade persons to convert. It penalises acts that constitute “infringement on state religion,” including unauthorised wearing of Buddhist monks’ robes in public, damaging Buddhist religious premises or sacred objects, and “insulting” a Buddhist monk or nun.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, ambiguous qualifications for registered status, ambiguous usage requirements imposed on places of worship, arbitrary enforcement, capacity quota for places of worship, excessive informational requirements, mandatory and separate registration procedures for each place of worship of a group, membership quota imposed on places of worship, multi-registration, no stipulated penalties for an unregistered group although unregistered places of worship and religious school may be temporarily shut down until they register, zoning quota imposed onto places of worship.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (not free; prohibited to import religious materials); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; non-Buddhist proselytism is illegal); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Dissolve aspects of legislation that are cumbersome and restrictive (e.g. multi-level authorisation, capacity and membership quotas, mandatory registration); end restrictions placed on non-Buddhist activities including proselytism and distribution of literatures; establish a system for existential recognition that possesses the provisions to protect non-Buddhist belief systems and groups.



Cameroon, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Cameroon is a secular state.

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Cameroon is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Cameroon did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatory of registration: mandatory and malregistration.

Registration policy: quasi-mandatory and discriminatory mandatory registration – although the Cameroonian government mandates that all religious organisations must register with a local government office and the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT) in order to operate legally, there are no formal penalties for religious groups that fail to register. However, the government reserves its right to suspend the activities of unregistered religious organisations. Exempt from registering are religious organisations that the government deems to be “indigenous” since the law characterises the practice of traditional religion as a private concern observed by members of a particular ethnic or kinship group or the residents of a particular locality. To register, religious organisations must meet the state definition of a ‘religious congregation’ as “any group of natural persons or corporate bodies whose vocation is divine worship” or “any group of persons living in community in accordance with a religious doctrine.” The applicant religious organisation must submit a request to the local government office a request for registration and include with it a charter describing planned activities, names and functions of the organisation’s officials, and a declaration of commitment to comply with the law on freedom of association. This application is then sent on to MINAT for review. MINAT reviews the file and sends it to the Presidency with a recommendation to approve or deny. Registration is granted by presidential decree. Official registration confers no general tax benefits but allows religious groups to receive real estate for the conduct of activities as a tax-free gift and to gather publicly and worship. It also permits missionaries for registered groups to receive visas with longer validity than do missionaries for unregistered entities. Unregistered religious organisations may gather publicly and worship under a policy of “administrative tolerance” as long as public security and peace are not disturbed. Most unregistered religious groups operate under the umbrella of a registered religious group, adopting that group’s name and submitting to the registered group’s oversight. MINAT may issue an order to suspend any religious group for “disturbing public order,” although no legislation defines these terms. The President may dissolve any previously authorised religious organisation that “deviates from its initial focus.”

Malregistration – in parts of northern Cameroon, the presence of the Islamist group Boko Haram has undermined the ability for the government to protect registered religious communities while in the southern parts of the country, attacks against members of religious communities resulting from the ongoing internal conflict remain common and undermine the government’s ability to uphold the rights of both registered and unregistered communities.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, broad grounds for the deregistration of religious groups, state definition of religion, the president has singular power to approve or deny a registration application of a religious group (authoritative decree).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (free); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (free); **public expression and observance** (free); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Reverse the use of broad grounds for the deregistration of groups unfavoured by the government; abolish state definition of religion and the imposition of a authoritative decree; establish an independent recognition agency to deal with recognition and registration rather than governmental departments.



Canada

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Canada is a secular state; theism was affirmed in the Constitution Act 1982.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 2011 against discrimination on the basis of religion.



Human rights instruments: Canada is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Canada rejected the UNDRIP; Canada eventually voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Canadian law does not require religious or belief organisations to register with the government in order to conduct operations legally. However, religious or belief organisations that do register receive tax-exempt status by the federal government and are recognised in law as ‘nonprofit organisations’ with the Charities Directorate of the Canada Revenue Agency. Nonprofit status provides such organizations with federal and provincial sales tax reductions, rebates, and exemptions. To gain and retain tax-exempt status, a group must be nonpolitical and undergo periodic audits. Charitable status also grants members of the clergy various federal benefits, including a housing deduction under the tax code and expedited processing through the immigration system. The term “clergy” includes persons whose communities have licensed, ordained, or otherwise formally recognized them for their religious leadership and authority to perform spiritual duties and services within their religious organisation. Individual citizens who donate to tax-exempt religious groups receive a federal tax receipt entitling them to federal income tax deductions.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation. In April 2023, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) reported that Quebec Education Minister Bernard Drainville issued a directive prohibiting prayer rooms or designated prayer spaces in publicly funded schools, in accordance with the province’s secularism law. The directive did not apply to private schools. Drainville said, “School is not a place of prayer. A person should not be able to use a classroom as a prayer room,” and added that students would still be allowed to pray “discreetly and silently.” In June, a Quebec court denied the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and National Council of Canadian Muslims an injunction to suspend the ban, ruling these groups failed to prove an urgent need to stay the ban while they challenged the directive in court.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free; some restrictions around the religious attire of government officials); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that caters for both existential recognition and legal registration simultaneously; to make this system dynamic, it would need to cater to both traditional or established belief systems and their derivatives as well as minorities and NRMs; this system should be complemented by the establishment of an independent recognition agency to ensure the system functions sufficiently and that does not come restrictive.

Central African Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: **Censorious**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**



Secularity: Central African Republic is a secular state according to the latest constitution from 2023; theism is affirmed in the presidential oath.

Protections: **Explicit protection is granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.**

Human rights instruments: Central African Republic is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Central African Republic eventually voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory and malregistration.**

Registration policy: quasi-mandatory and discriminatory mandatory registration – by law, all religious organisations in the Central African Republic must register with the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Public Security, and Ministry of Territorial Administration in order to operate legally in the country yet no formal penalties are prescribed in law for religious organisations that operate without registering. However, animist spiritualist communities are exempt from having to register and may receive benefits and exemptions offered to registered religious organisations without needing to register. Despite the mandatory registration order in place, religious organisations seeking registration must prove that they have a minimum of 1,000 members and that their leaders have adequate religious education, a qualification that is not specifically defined. The law permits the government to deny registration to any religious group deemed offensive to public morals or likely to disturb social peace. It allows the suspension of registered religious groups if their activities are judged subversive by legal entities. There are no fees for registration as a religious group. Registration confers official recognition and benefits, such as exemptions from customs tariffs for vehicles or equipment imported into the country.

Malregistration – the ongoing internal conflict undermines the ability for the central government to ensure that even registered religious communities can conduct their activities freely with Russian mercenary forces and the country's own armed forces target Muslims populating the northwest region.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, broad grounds for the denial of registration which are vulnerable to misuse against unfavoured religious groups, broad grounds for the deregistration of religious groups, excessive qualifications and qualifications intertwined with a membership quota, membership quota, penalties for unregistration are unclear.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierony** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not subject; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Abolish excessive qualifications and membership quota; broad grounds for the denial of registration must no longer be used against religious groups unfavoured by the government; provide greater clarity on laws regarding unregistration; establish differentiation between legal registration for physical entities (e.g. organisations) and existential recognition for abstract entities (e.g. belief systems, denominations, communities).

Chad, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: **Censorious**

ForB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: **Chad is a secular state.**

Protections: **Explicit protection is granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.**

Human rights instruments: Chad is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Chad was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Chad did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory.**

Registration policy: discriminatory mandatory registration – the Chadian government mandates that all religious organisations wishing to operate legally in the country register with the Ministry of Interior with the exception of what the government deems to be traditional indigenous religious groups. This mandatory registration order also applies to all foreign missionary organisations wishing to set up activities in Chad. The Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs under the Ministry of Interior oversees religious matters, arbitrates inter-communal disputes, and ensures religious freedom as outlined in the constitution is protected. The ministry conducts background checks on every founding member and establishes a six-month temporary, but renewable, authorisation to operate, pending final authorisation and approval. Failure to register with the ministry means organisations are not considered legal entities and may not open bank accounts or enter contracts; it may also lead to the banning of a group. Group founders or board members may be subject to one month to one year in prison and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 CFA francs (\$84 to \$840) for failure to register. Registration does not confer tax preferences or other benefits. The position of Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs rotates every two years among Muslims, Protestants, and Catholics. The office contains a special bureau for Hajj and Umrah under the supervision of the Presidency of the Republic, with members chosen annually by presidential decree. The HCIA deals directly with the Ministries of Interior and Territorial Administration and Decentralised Territorial Collectivities or with the civil Office of the President of the Republic to address concerns with Wahhabi groups. Burqas, defined by ministerial notice as “any garment where one sees only the eyes,” are forbidden by ministerial decree. The ministerial notice also applies to niqabs, although this ban is routinely unenforced. The HCIA, an independent government body, oversees Islamic religious activities, including some Arabic-language schools and institutions of higher learning, and represents the country’s Muslim community at international Islamic forums. The government approves those nominated by members of the HCIA to serve on the council. Wahhabis are nominated to serve on the council but have not participated due to their stated concerns regarding the council’s role in the government ban on their activities. Muslim Brotherhood adherents also sit on the council, operating under the umbrella of Sufi groups rather than as overt representatives of Muslim Brotherhood groups. The Grand Imam of N’Djamena, who is selected by a committee of Muslim elders and approved by the government, is the de jure president of the HCIA and oversees the heads of the HCIA branches and grand imams from each of the country’s 23 provinces. He has the authority to restrict Muslim groups from proselytising, to regulate the content of mosque sermons, and to control activities of Islamic charities. Although the country is legally defined as a secular state, the HCIA has jurisdiction for some issues, including personal status issues such as marriage, property disposition between spouses, divorce, and parentage.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, arbitrary enforcement, excessive informational requirements, temporary recognition, unregistered groups may be subject to bans and their leaders levied with fines.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Dissolve existent restrictions in the registration process such as the criminalisation of unregistered groups with a prison term and a fine, temporary recognition and excessive informational requirements; making the Office of the Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs independent from government would make the Chadian system more dynamic.



Chile, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: **Dynamic**



FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: **Chile is a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1925).**

Protections: **Explicit protection is granted in law against discrimination on the basis of religion.**

Human rights instruments: Chile is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Chile voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatory of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – the government of Chile does not mandate that religious organisations register with the Ministry of Justice unless they wish to receive tax benefits. Religious organisations may establish and maintain places of worship if the locations comply with public hygiene and security regulations established by laws and municipal orders. Registered religious organisations are recognised in law under the designation ‘religious nonprofit organisation.’ Religious organisations have the option of adopting a charter and bylaws suited to a religious entity rather than to a private corporation or a secular nonprofit. Under the law, religious nonprofit organisations may create affiliates, such as charitable foundations, schools, or additional houses of worship, that retain the tax benefits of the parent religious organisation. The National Office of Religious Affairs (ONAR) is charged with facilitating communication between faith communities and the government and ensuring the protection of the rights of members of minority religious groups. According to ONAR, public law recognises more than 5,957 religious organisations as legal entities. By law, the Ministry of Justice must accept the registration petition of a religious entity, although it may object to petitions within 90 days if legal prerequisites for registration are not satisfied. Applicants for religious nonprofit status must provide the Ministry of Justice with an authorised copy of their charter and corresponding bylaws with charter members’ signatures and national identification numbers. The bylaws must include the organisation’s mission, creed, and structure. The charter must specify the signatories, the name of the organisation, and its physical address, and it must include confirmation the religious institution’s charter signatories approved the bylaws. In the event the Ministry of Justice raises objections to the group, the group has 60 days to address the ministry’s objections or challenge them in court. Once a religious entity is registered, the state may not dissolve it by decree. If concerns are raised regarding a religious group’s activities after registration, the semiautonomous Council for the Defense of the State may initiate a judicial review of the matter. One registration per religious group is sufficient to extend nonprofit status to affiliates, such as additional places of worship or schools, clubs, or sports organisations, without registering them as separate entities. The law grants all religious groups the right to appoint chaplains to offer religious services in public hospitals and prisons and does not make a distinction between registered and unregistered groups. Prisoners may request religious accommodations. Regulations allow officially registered religious groups to appoint chaplains to serve in each branch of the armed forces, the national uniformed police, and the national investigative police.

Key restriction tools imposed: **amalgamation.**

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish differentiation between recognition and registration in order to cater to belief systems, denominations and communities.

Colombia, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForRB Claim: Partial claim is made as “Satanism, or magical, superstitious, or spiritualistic practices” are not protected under the law.

Secularity: Colombia is officially a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1936); however, a concordat with the Holy See grants the Roman Catholic Church privileges, such as allowing the Church to provide chaplaincy services, that are not afforded to other religious denominations; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2015.

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in law against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Colombia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Colombia abstained from the UNDRIP but has since endorsed it; Colombia voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although the Colombian government claims that it does not mandate that religious organisations register with the Ministry of Interior (MOI), the fact that unregistered religious organisations are not allowed to engage in fundraising or receive non-financial private donations makes the policy in effect mandatory. Registration results in what the law calls ‘extended public recognition’ which groups can grant to their affiliate organisations sharing the same beliefs without having to complete separate registration applications. The MOI is responsible for formally recognising churches, religious denominations, religious federations and confederations, and associations of religious ministers, as well as keeping a public registry of religious organisations. Organisations formally recognised by the ministry may then confer this recognition, called “extended public recognition,” to affiliated groups sharing the same beliefs. The application process requires submission of a formal request and basic organisational information, including copies of the organisation’s constitution and an estimate of the number of members. The government considers a religious group’s total membership, its “degree of acceptance within society,” and other factors, such as the organisation’s statutes and its required behavioral norms, when deciding whether to grant formal recognition. The MOI provides a free, internet-based registration process for religious and faith-based organisations seeking recognition. Formally recognised religious organisations may collect funds and receive donations, establish religious education institutions, and perform religious services, excluding marriages. Unregistered ones may perform religious activities without penalty but may not collect funds or receive non-financial private donations. According to the law, all associations, foundations, and corporations declared as nonprofit organisations, including foundations supported by churches or religious organisations recognized by the MOI, must pay taxes. Churches and religious organisations recognised by the MOI are tax exempt, but they must report their income and expenses to the National Tax and Customs Authority. According to a Constitutional Court ruling, the state may not seize the assets of non-Catholic churches in legal proceedings if the church meets the requirements for formal government recognition. Decree 922 of 2023 went into effect in June 2023 which granted eight additional religious organisations the permission to engage in activities such as marriages, funeral services, and spiritual assistance in prisons, hospitals, military facilities, and educational institutions. Under the decree, members of religious groups that are neither signatories to the decrees nor affiliated with signatories must marry in a civil ceremony for the state to recognize the marriage. Religious groups not signatories to the 1997 or 2023 public laws may not provide chaplaincy services or conduct state-recognised marriages. Foreign missionaries are eligible to apply for two types of religious visas within the category of tourist visas, either as religious leaders and personnel (valid for two years) or religious students/volunteers (valid for one year). The MFA issues visas to foreign missionaries and religious group administrators, who are members of religious organisations officially recognised and registered with the MOI. When applying for a visa, foreign missionaries must provide a certificate from either the MOI or church authorities confirming registration of their religious group with the MFA. Alternatively, they may provide a certificate issued by a registered religious group confirming the applicant’s membership and mission in the country. The visa application also requires a letter issued by a legal representative of the religious group stating the organisation accepts full financial responsibility for the expenses of the applicant and family, including funds for return to their country of origin or last country of residence. Applicants must explain the purpose of the proposed activities and provide proof of economic means. A Constitutional Court ruling stipulates that although missionaries may work in the country, no group may impose forced religious conversion on members of Indigenous communities.

Key restriction tools imposed: barring unregistered groups from collecting funds or receiving donations interferes with “basic religious activities”, borderline excessive informational requirements depending on how the information is used regarding number of members so it does not turn into a membership quota.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (free though not for all communities); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to recognition); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (free); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (free); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Reverse bans on unregistered religious groups be able to legally collect and receive donations due to this being classified as a basic religious activity. Resolve some of the minor issues with borderline excessive informational requirements. In order to be classified Dynamic, establish greater differentiations between existential recognition and legal registration and establish a recognition agency that works independently of the government.

Comoros, Union of the

2024 RoRB Classification: **Terminal**

FoRB Claim: Partial claim is made and constrained by sharia-compliant reservations.

Secularity: Sunni Islam is the state denomination with the latest constitution from 2018 establishing the Shafi'i school as the "official religious reference" of the country's legal system; theism is affirmed in the presidential oath.

Protections: Protection is granted in the 2018 constitution against discrimination "of any kind" but religion is not mentioned specifically.

Human rights instruments: Comoros is party to the UNCRC and the UNDRIP; Comoros is a signatory to both the ICCPR and the ICESCR but has not ratified either; Comoros did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **non-registration.**

Registration policy: non-registration – there is no registration procedure for religious organisations outlined in law; only Sunni Muslim organisations may legally establish places of worship, train clergy and assemble. The government does not allow non-Sunni religious groups to assemble for peaceful religious activities in public places, although foreigners are permitted to worship at three Christian churches in Moroni, Mutsamudu, and Moheli, and foreign Shia Muslims are permitted to worship at a Shia mosque in Moroni.

Key restriction tools imposed: non-recognition of any denomination other than Sunni Islam, non-response to applications from non-Sunni groups, non-Sunni organisations are blocked from receiving registered status. The law prohibits proselytising or the performance of non-Sunni religious rituals in public places, to avoid "affronting society's cohesion and endangering national unity." Proselytising for any religion except Sunni Islam is illegal, and the law provides for the deportation of foreigners who do so. The penal code states, "Whoever discloses, spreads, and teaches Muslims a religion other than Islam will be punished with imprisonment of three months to one year and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 Comorian francs" (\$115 to \$1,150). The law also states, "The sale [or] the free distribution to Muslims of books, brochures, magazines, records and cassettes or any other media teaching a religion other than Islam" will be punished with the same penalties.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; prohibited to convert from Sunni Islam); **hieronymy** (not free; prohibited to import non-Sunni religious materials and items); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; prohibited for all non-Sunni religious groups; foreigners will face deportation); **public expression and observance** (not free; non-Sunni public expression or observance prohibited); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; non-Sunni literature prohibited); **religious and worship services** (not free; prohibited); **religious trade** (not free; illegal).

Recommendations

The non-registration policy still imposed by the Comoran government inhibits any non-Sunni religious community from obtaining legality to exist in the country and so must be abolished; a registration procedure that is non-mandatory but also available to all religious groups needs to be established in law and carried out by the government; abolish the restrictions in law placed on the basic religious activities of all non-Sunni religious groups.



Congo, Democratic Republic of the

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Democratic Republic of the Congo is a secular state; however, theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2011.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the 2011 revised constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Democratic Republic of the Congo is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Democratic Republic of the Congo did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatory registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the government of the DRC mandates that all religious organisations, including those of domestic and foreign origin, register with it to operate legally in the country. This mandatory policy extends to all non-profit entities affiliated with a religion which must also register separately. The Congolese government has the power granted in law to legally recognise, suspend recognition of, or dissolve religious groups. To register, religious organisations are required to submit a copy of their bylaws and constitution to the Ministry of Justice issues a provisional approval and, within six months, a permanent approval or rejection; unless the ministry specifically rejects the application, the group is considered approved and registered after six months even if the ministry has not issued a final determination. Religious organisations with a foreign headquarters must undergo an approval by the Presidency in addition to the justice ministry. The law secularises religious organisations by officially recognising them in law as non-profit organisations. The law prescribes penalties of up to two years' imprisonment, a fine of 200,000 Congolese francs (\$75), or both for groups that are not properly registered but receive gifts and donations on behalf of a church or other religious organisation. By law, eight religious groups that meet certain characteristics with regard to their status and competence in electoral matters (i.e., acting as civil society organisations) are charged with nominating the head of CENI: the Catholic Church, national umbrella organisation for Protestant groups, Muslim community, Salvation Army, Independent Church of Congo, Kimbanguists, Revival Church, and Independent Orthodox Church. The Ministry of Justice did not issue any final registration permits for religious groups; it had not done so since 2014, despite the law stipulating that groups are automatically registered if the ministry does not issue a decision on their applications within six months of their submission. The government, however, continued its practice of allowing domestic religious groups that had pending registration permit requests to operate, and these groups reported they continued to do so unhindered. Foreign-based religious groups stated they operated without restriction after applying for legal status. Under existing law, which remained under review, nonprofit organisations could operate as legal entities if a government ministry ruled favourably on their application or by default if the government did not object to their application for status. According to registration statistics for 2015, the latest year for which the Ministry of Justice had such data, there were 14,568 legally registered nonprofit organisations, 11,119 legal religious nonprofit organisations, and 1,073 foreign nonprofit organisations in the country.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, arbitrary enforcement, no permanent registration permits dispensed since 2014, registration of GFOs is dependent upon presidential decree, subsidiaries organisations affiliated with a registered religious organisation are required to register separately, temporary registration, vague "public order" narrative tool is invoked that could lead to its misuse against groups unfavoured, Muslims complain that access to pastoral services such as chaplains for those in the military, police, and hospitals is restricted to Christian groups.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the retribution for unregistration; remove all instances of political involvement in the registration process, namely the requirement for the Presidency to approve religious groups of foreign origin; revoke the mandatory registration rule and other restrictive policies part of the registration process.

Congo, Republic of the

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Republic of the Congo is a secular state; however, Christianity is privileged by the state because registration law requires those wishing to lead a religious congregation to be knowledgeable regarding the Bible.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 2015 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Republic of the Congo is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Republic of the Congo did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – all religious organisations are required by law to register with and be approved by the Ministry of Interior to operate legally in the country. To register, religious organisations must present a title or lease to the property where the establishment is located, the exact address of the establishment, a copy of its bylaws, and a document that clarifies the mission and objectives of the organisation. Failure to register is criminalised in law with penalties including fines and the confiscation of goods, invalidation of contracts, and deportation of foreign group members. Religious applicants who request to lead a religious group must present a certificate of qualifications that demonstrates the applicant has undergone formal or informal religious training, is generally knowledgeable regarding the Bible, and is therefore qualified to lead a religious establishment.

Recognition policy: a 2017 bilateral framework agreement between the government and the Holy See formalised relations between the government and the Catholic Church. The agreement defines places of worship, cemeteries, and ecclesiastical sites; penal case processes for clergy, property rights; rules pertaining to the use of mass media; education; appointment of chaplains to the security forces; and church institutional activities providing health, education, social, and medical services for the common good.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, criminalisation of unregistered religious activities with fines and other penalties, informational requirements are likely to be misused against groups unfavoured by the government.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (not free; restrictions imposed on religious attire); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Dissolve all restrictive policies, particularly the mandatory registration rule and excessive informational requirements; abolish the law criminalising unregistered religious activity; reverse the ban on religious clothing that targets the Muslim community.

Costa Rica, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Partial claim is made.

Secularity: Roman Catholicism is the state denomination; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2011.

Protections: Implicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 2011 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Costa Rica is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Costa Rica voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although the Costa Rican government does not mandate that religious organisations register to organise worship services or to practise their beliefs in public or private, organisations must register to conduct any kind of fundraising which in effect makes registration mandatory. Registration is conducted with the Ministry of Justice which manages the public registry but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship is also involved in managing the relationship between the state and religious organisations. The Catholic Church is exempt from having to register. Registration is only available to religious organisations with ten members or more and religious organisations must register under the secular designation 'association with judicial status.' The registration process is called incorporation. Authorities require registration to conduct financial transactions, obtain legal representation, and own property. Immigration law requires foreign religious workers to belong to a religious group accredited for migration control purposes by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship. It stipulates religious workers may receive permission, which is renewable, to stay at least 90 days, but not more than two years. To obtain accreditation, a religious group must present documentation about its organisation, including its complete name, number of followers, bank information, number of houses of worship, and names of and information on the group's board of directors. Immigration regulations require religious workers to apply for temporary residence before arrival. Members of Protestant groups registered as secular associations continued to state their preference for a separate registration process that would specifically cover church construction and operation, permits to organize events, and pastoral access to hospitals and prisons for members of non-Catholic religious groups. The groups continued to seek the changes through the passage of a religious freedom bill under legislative review since 2018. If passed, the bill would address the concerns of non-Catholic groups regarding the registration of religious groups, including through language clarifying the definition of religious groups. According to authorities, when the government denied a religious group's registration, it was often because the group's purpose or main activity did not include worship. In the case of the Catholic Church, the government continued to address such concerns through the special legal recognition afforded the Church under canon law.

Recognition policy: the constitution requires the Costa Rican government to contribute to the maintenance of the Roman Catholic Church. Unlike other religious groups, the Catholic Church receives special legal recognition under a concordat, and it is not registered as an association. Its assets and holdings are governed consistent with Catholic canon law. The law allows the government to provide land free of charge only to the Catholic Church. Only Catholic priests and public notaries may perform state-recognised marriages. Wedding ceremonies performed by other religious groups must be legalised through a civil union. The constitution forbids Catholic clergy from serving in the capacity of president, vice president, cabinet member, or Supreme Court justice. This prohibition does not apply to non-Catholic clergy.

Key restriction tools imposed: membership quota, non-recognition for any non-Catholic religion or denomination, places of worship must be registered separately from the religious organisations to which they are affiliated, registration is made a prerequisite of a group's eligibility to legally engage in fundraising, verticalism.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a system that has the capacity to differentiate between existential recognition and legal registration and that can bestow these equitably; remove the stipulation of membership quota, that registration is a prerequisite for fundraising, that places of worship need to be registered independently from the organisations with which they are affiliated and the vertical recognition system that is in effect; resolve the issue of partial recognition being in effect by establishing provisions for all groups to saying recognition on a level playing field.



Côte d'Ivoire, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Côte d'Ivoire is a secular state; however, the leader of a Christian denomination has consistently claimed that the government extends preferential treatment to Islamic religious groups for instance by providing them with more funding than Christian groups.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitutional revision from 2016 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Côte d'Ivoire is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Côte d'Ivoire was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Côte d'Ivoire did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: quasi-mandatory registration – Ivorian law mandates that all religious organisations—both foreign-based and domestic—notify the government of their existence before operating in the country. The law also mandates that all religious organisations register with the Department of Faith-Based Organizations (DGC) although no penalties are prescribed in law for religious groups that do not register. To register, a group must provide its bylaws, names of the founding members and board members, date of founding, and general assembly minutes to the DGC. The DGC investigates the group to ensure it has no members or purpose deemed politically subversive and that no members have been judicially deprived of their civil and political rights. Local religious groups are allowed to operate for two months without official approval after they submit their registration application. The DGC, part of the Ministry of Interior and Security, is charged with promoting dialogue among religious groups as well as between the government and religious groups, providing administrative support to religious groups attempting to become established in the country, monitoring religious activities, and managing state-sponsored religious pilgrimages and registration of new religious groups. Foreign religious groups with a presence in the country require additional authorisation from the Minister of Interior and Security. Whether a religious group is categorised as local or foreign is based on the nationality of its members, the source of its funding, the make-up of its executive board, and the location of its head office. Groups with 75 percent foreign membership, foreign funding, foreign board members, or a foreign head office are considered foreign. Foreign religious groups are technically not allowed to begin operating until they receive authorisation, but this is not enforced. Registered groups benefit from government support, such as free access to state-run television and radio for religious programming if requested. Registered religious groups are not charged import duties on devotional items, such as religious books or rosaries. Registered religious groups are also exempt from property tax on the places of worship they own. Non-registered groups are not allowed to sue for damages or receive compensation for injuries suffered, but members of these groups may do so as individuals. In October 2023, the DGC reported that the government was planning to update the law defining and governing religious groups. A new law was drafted but was not available for public review. The DGC said the new law would update the definitions of religious groups to better differentiate them from civil society groups; the original legislation, which dated to 1960 when the country gained independence, blurred that distinction. The new law, according to the DGC, would draw a clearer distinction between the two types of entities and allow for different regulatory approaches for each.

Key restriction tools imposed: arbitrary enforcement, discriminatory rules apply for local and foreign religious groups attempting registration, narrative tool of "politically subversive" may be misused as a grounds for deregistration.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (free); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Revoke the law on mandatory registration, including the mandatory notification order; abolish the rule that local and foreign religious organisations have different registration procedures; the proposed law that will distinguish more clearly between religious and secular organisations registration is welcomed but needs to see implementation before it can be assessed for its compliance with ForRB.

Croatia, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.



Secularity: Croatia is a secular state; however, the Roman Catholic Church receives state financial support, including for religious officials, and other benefits such as funding for religious education in public schools as a result of the Holy See's four concordats with the government (the first three date to 1997 and the fourth was adopted in 1998).

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitutional revision from 2013 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Croatia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Croatia did not vote on the UDHR; Croatia is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Croatian law does not mandate that religious organisations register with the government in order to engage in worship, proselytise, own property, and import religious literature, but religious organisations must register in order for religious leaders to provide spiritual counsel in prisons, hospitals, and the military. Registered religious communities that have not concluded agreements with the state and unregistered religious groups may not conduct religious education in public schools. Unregistered religious groups have no access to state funds in support of religious activities, including charitable work, counselling, and building costs. The state recognises marriages conducted by registered religious communities that have concluded agreements with the state, eliminating the need for civil registration. Marriages conducted by registered communities that have not concluded agreements with the state, or by unregistered religious groups, require civil registration. The law defines the legal position of religious communities and determines eligibility for government funding and tax benefits. Registered religious communities are exempt from taxes on the purchase of real estate, the profit/capital gains tax, and taxes on donations. According to the law, a religious community previously active as a legal entity before the enactment of the existing law in 2002 (amended in 2013) need only submit its name, the location of its headquarters, information on the office of the person authorised to represent it, and the seal and stamp it uses to register. To register as a religious community, a religious group without prior legal status as a religious community must have at least 500 members and have been registered as an association with at least three members for at least five years. To register as a religious community, a group must also submit a list of its members and documentation outlining the group's activities and bylaws and describing its mission to the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration. Unregistered religious groups may operate freely but do not receive tax benefits. They may conduct financial transactions as legal entities. A contractual agreement with the state, which grants a registered religious community eligibility for further funding and benefits, defines the community's role and activities and provides for collaboration with the government in areas of joint interest, such as education, health, and culture.

Recognition policy: stipulatory registration – in addition to the Catholic Church, as of March 2023, 20 of the registered religious communities have formal agreements with the state that more clearly define activities and cooperation, such as in the areas of marriage and religious education in public schools. These groups may access state funds for religious activities. Since March, the government also has an agreement with the Reformed Christian Church of Hungarians in Croatia on matters of mutual interest and an annex to the agreement with the Reformed Christian Church in Croatia on matters of mutual interest.

Key restriction tools imposed: excessive informational requirements (namely requiring a list of members), longevity quota, membership quotas (500 members), reregistration (all groups registered before 2002).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish differentiation between existential recognition and legal registration and ensure appropriate provisions for the execution of each are put in place; remove membership quotas and other intrusive informational requirements from the registration process; solving these minor issues with the system will see Croatia ascend to the highest classification of dynamic.

Cuba, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: **Terminal**

ForRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Cuba is a hypersecular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1902); the official ideology of Cuba is Marxism-Leninism; Cuba used to be an atheist state until 2019.

Protections: **Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 2019 against discrimination on the basis of religion.**

Human rights instruments: Cuba is party to the UNCRC and the UNDRIP; Cuba is a signatory of both the ICCPR and the ICESCR but did not ratify either; Cuba voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory.**

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Cuban law mandates that all religious organisations apply with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) for official registration prior to beginning their operations in Cuba. The Office of Religious Affairs (ORA) monitors all religious activity in Cuba under direction of the Cuban Communist Party (CCP). The MOJ secularises religious organisations by registering them under the secular designation ‘association’ and the registration is similar to the registration procedure for civil society organisations. The application process requires religious groups to identify the location of their activities, their proposed leadership, and their funding sources, among other requirements. Even if the MOJ grants official registration, the religious group must request permission from the ORA each time it wants to conduct activities other than regular services, such as holding meetings in approved locations, publishing major decisions from meetings, receiving foreign visitors, importing religious literature, purchasing and operating motor vehicles, and constructing, repairing, or purchasing places of worship. Groups that fail to register face penalties ranging from fines to closure of their organisations and confiscation of their property. The penal code states membership in or association with an unregistered group, including a religious group, is a crime; penalties range from fines to three months’ imprisonment, and leaders of such groups may be sentenced to up to two years in prison in addition to fines. The law regulates the registration of “house churches” (private residences used as places of worship). Two house churches of the same denomination may not exist within 1.2 miles of one another. House churches must provide detailed information – including the number of worshippers, dates and times of services, and the names and ages of all inhabitants of the house in which services are held – to authorities. The law states if authorisation is granted, authorities will supervise the operation of meetings; they may suspend meetings in the house for a year or more if they find a house church does not fulfil the requirements. If a neighbour registers a complaint against a church, the house church may be closed permanently and members subject to imprisonment. Foreigners must obtain permission before attending services in a house church; foreigners may not attend house churches in some regions. According to law, any violation will result in fines and closure of the house church. The penal code also imposes sentences of up to 10 years’ imprisonment on those receiving funding from foreign organisations, including religious groups, or financing activities the government considers to be directed against the state or its constitutional order.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, criminalisation of leading or becoming a member of an unregistered religious group, denial of registration or non-response to some registration applications (as early as 1994; e.g., for Jehovah’s Witnesses), pseudo-registration, restrictions persist around the religious activities of foreigners, state supervision of religious gatherings, zoning quota. In August 2023, CSW documented at least four separate instances of state authorities, including officials from the DSE, the PNR, and the Department of Physical Planning, issuing threats or intimidating Afro-Cuban religious groups or leaders based their intent to engage in unregistered religious activities. According to CSW, many religious groups continued to state their lack of legal registration impeded their ability to practice their religion. Several religious groups, including Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ, still had not received decisions from the MOJ on pending applications for official registration, some dating as far back as 1994. In May, members and leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ visited the country to inaugurate a fifth congregation in the Havana District; however, the Church remained unrecognised, and therefore an illegal organisation. Despite a 2019 letter from then Cuban ambassador to the United States, Jose Cabanas, to the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ in Salt Lake City stating the denomination was “welcome” in the country, as of year’s end, the MOJ again had not acted on the Church’s registration request. Representatives of several religious groups and religious freedom organisations said the government continued to interpret the law on associations as a means for the ORA and the MOJ to deny registration of certain groups. They also said the MOJ’s determinations of ineligibilities for registration sometimes included the assertion that another group already had identical or similar objectives, which these representatives said was a government pretext to control and favor certain factions of a religious denomination or one religious group’s activities over those of other groups. At year’s end, Soka Gakkai continued to be the only Buddhist organisation registered with the government, and the Islamic League was the only registered Islamic organisation. The CCP continued to directly govern religious freedom through the ORA, which has authority over all matters related to religious groups, including their registration, travel outside the country, and building and construction permits. According to religious leaders of unregistered churches, the government continued to selectively prevent some religious groups from establishing accredited schools. These leaders said religious groups that were registered with the government and were willing to participate in government events were allowed to operate seminaries, interfaith training centers, before-and-after-school programs, eldercare programs, weekend retreats, workshops for primary and secondary students, and higher education programs. The ACC is composed of approximately 50 leaders of registered and unregistered religious denominations and networks as well as leaders of independent churches on the island. Several religious freedom organisations previously submitted reports to the UPR, including the Alliance of Unregistered Cuban Churches, the OAA, the ACN, Prisoners Defenders, and the Patmos Institute, among others.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarcy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted and subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted and the dissemination of religious information illegal); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (free); **religious instruction** (not free; private religious instruction is illegal); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted and subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; restricted and subject to registration).

Recommendations

Abolish the criminalisation of unregistered religious activity; abolish the mandatory registration order imposed on religious organisations.



Cyprus, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Cyprus is officially a secular state (the Autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus was disestablished in 1977); however, the Autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus remains recognised as the national church and was granted special privileges in the constitution such as the exclusive right to regulate and administer the Church's internal affairs and property in accordance with its canons and charter; the Islamic Vakf was also given similar special privileges in the constitution; constitutional recognition is also granted to Maronite Catholicism, the Armenian Orthodox Church, and Latin Rite Roman Catholicism.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 2013 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Cyprus is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Cyprus did not vote on the UDHR; Cyprus is party to the ECHR.

Mandatory registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: discriminatory and pseudo-mandatory registration – all religious organisations not affiliated with the denominations recognised in the constitution are officially not mandated to register with the Cypriot government but they must register to legally engage in financial transactions and maintain bank accounts. Religious organisations are secularised under the law by having to register under the secular designation 'non-profit organisation.' To register, a religious group must submit, through an attorney, an application to the Registrar of Companies under the Ministry of Energy, Commerce, and Industry stating its purpose and providing the names of its directors. Religious groups registered as nonprofit organisations are treated the same as other nonprofit organisations. They are tax exempt, must provide annual reports to the government, and are not eligible for government subsidies.

Recognition policy: the clergy of the five religious communities (recognised by the Republic of Cyprus constitution) have the authority to perform marriage ceremonies and may sign marriage certificates. Members of the clergy of other faiths must apply to the Ministry of Interior (MOI) for authorisation to perform marriages. The list of authorised marriage officers is published in the Official Gazette. Divorce requires a court decision. A state physician or pathologist, not a member of the clergy, signs all death certificates. According to the law, the Armenian, Maronite, and Latin communities each have an elected representative to parliament who has nonvoting observer status. Members of these communities also may run for any of the 56 seats that have voting rights in the body. According to media reports, during a meeting on June 7, the Chief Rabbi of Israel, David Lau, asked ROC President Christodoulides to remedy some of the challenges faced by the Jewish community in Cyprus, namely the lack of practical legislation to accommodate the activities of the Chief Rabbinate of Cyprus, such as authorisation to register Jewish marriages in the national civil registry.

Key restriction tools imposed: constitutional recognition, privileges granted to those religious groups recognised in the constitution, pseudo-mandatory registration policy imposed.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Abolish the law stipulating that only religious organisations may not engage in financial transactions and maintain bank accounts. Religious groups not recognised in the constitution are secularised in law and not understood as religious entities which creates a problematic hierarchy.

Czech Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made, but it is only made in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms which is a document supplemental to the constitution.

Secularity: Czech Republic is a secular state.

Protections: No protection was specifically granted against discrimination on the basis of religion in the latest constitution from 2013 nor in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms.

Human rights instruments: Czech Republic is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Czech Republic did not vote on the UDHR; Czech Republic is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Czech law does not mandate that religious organisations register with the government in order to assemble, worship and propagate religious beliefs and the freedoms of unregistered religious organisations are recognised. However, only registered religious organisations may legally own property. The registration process secularises religious organisations by registering them under the secular designation ‘civic association.’ The law states the Department of Churches within the Ministry of Culture (MOC) is responsible for religious affairs. The law establishes a two-tiered system for religious groups that register with the ministry. To qualify for the first (lower) tier, a religious group must present to the Department of Churches at least 300 signatures of adult members permanently residing in the country, a founding document listing the basic tenets of the faith, and a clearly defined structure of fiduciary responsibilities. First-tier registration confers limited tax benefits, including exemptions from taxes on interest earned on current account deposits, donations, and members’ contributions. For second (higher) tier registration, a group must have been registered with the Department of Churches as a first-tier group for 10 years, have published annual financial reports for 10 years prior to the second-tier application, and have membership equal to at least 0.1 percent of the population, i.e., approximately 10,700 persons. The group must provide this number of signatures as proof. Second-tier registration entitles religious groups to the tax benefits granted to first-tier groups and the exercise of special rights, including conducting weddings, teaching religion at public schools, and conducting chaplaincy services in the military and prisons. Prisoners may receive visits from their own clergy, regardless of the clergy’s registration status. The government requires second-tier groups to publish an annual report on their exercise of the special rights. There are 44 state-registered religious groups – 23 first and 21 second tier. Second-tier religious groups registered prior to 2002 are entitled to government subsidies. The law phases out direct state subsidies to second-tier religious groups over a 17-year period ending in 2029. The MOC reviews applications for first- and second-tier registration with input from other government bodies such as the Office for Protection of Private Data and from outside experts on religious affairs. While the law sets a 30-day deadline for administrative decisions, it allows for extensions that can delay decisions indefinitely. Applicants denied registration may appeal to the Minister of Culture to reconsider its decision and, if denied again, to the courts. The law permits second-tier religious groups to apply through the MOC to teach religion in state schools if there is a demand for such classes. Eleven of the 21 second-tier groups have permission to teach religion classes. The religious groups provide the teachers, and the school pays their salaries. If a state school does not have enough funds to pay for its religious education teachers, religious groups pay for them. Student attendance at religious classes is optional. According to law, if seven or more students register for a particular religion class at the beginning of the school year, a school must offer that class to those who registered. Religious workers who are not from European Economic Area countries or Switzerland must obtain long-term residence and work permits to remain in the country for more than 90 days. There is no special visa category for religious workers. Foreign missionaries and clergy are required to meet the requirements for a standard work permit.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, baseless or suspected baseless denials of registration, experts on religious affairs and other ministries are consulted on registration applications, open-ended registration, longevity quota, membership quota, signature quota, vertical registration system (verticalism), questionable denials of registration. In September, the Czech Social Christian Church appealed the MOC’s 2022 decision to reject its registration application directly to the Minister of Culture. As of the end of the year, the minister had not rendered a decision. In April, the Supreme Administrative Court rejected the PGJ’s 2021 appeal of the Prague Municipal Court decision to uphold the MOC’s denial of its registration. In November 2022, the Protestant Church of Saint Corona appealed to the Prague Municipal Court the MOC’s 2022 decision to deny its registration. The case remained pending at year’s end. In July 2022, the Church of Laughter appealed the Prague Municipal Court’s 2022 decision to uphold the MOC’s 2019 and 2020 denials of its registration. The case remained pending at the Supreme Administrative Court at year’s end.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration as a second-tier group); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition agency independent of government that deals with and facilitates religious recognition and registration processes. Revoke the membership quotas and dismantle the elements of the system that correspond to vertical recognition in an effort to make the system fairer.



Denmark, Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForB Claim: No claim was made in the 1953 constitution according to which “rules for religious bodies dissenting from the Established Church shall be laid down by Statute.”

Secularity: Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Denmark (ELC) is the state denomination of Denmark established in the latest constitution from 1953 and is recognised as the national church; the ELC receives state support and the reigning monarch must belong to it.

Protections: No protection was specifically granted in the 1953 constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Denmark is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Denmark voted in favour of the UDHR; Denmark is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Danish law does not mandate that religious organisations register with the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs for such organisations to operate freely and legally. The Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs is responsible for granting official status to religious groups other than the ELC through recognition by royal decree for groups recognised prior to 1970 (such as the Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish communities) or through official registration. Congregations are not required to register by law, although registration is required to receive tax benefits. Religious communities must comply with annual reporting requirements to maintain their government recognition. According to the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, there are 192 religious groups and congregations the government officially recognises or that are affiliated with recognised groups: 119 are Christian, 36 Muslim, 20 Buddhist, five Hindu, three Jewish, and there are nine other groups and congregations, including Baha’is and followers of the Indigenous Norse belief system Forn Sidr. The law codifies the registration process for religious communities other than the ELC and treats equally those recognised by royal decree and those approved through registration. A religious community must have at least 50 adult members who have resident status or possess Danish citizenship. For congregations located in sparsely populated regions such as Greenland, the government applies a lower population threshold, which varies according to the total population of the region. Religious groups seeking registration must submit a document describing the group’s central traditions and most important rituals to the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs. A group applying for registration must also provide a copy of its rules, regulations, and organisational structure; an audited financial statement (which it must submit annually); information about the group’s leadership; and a statement on the number of adult members permanently residing in the country. Groups also must have formal procedures for membership and make their teachings available to all members. The ministry makes the final decision on registration applications after receiving recommendations from a group consisting of a lawyer, religious historian, sociologist of religion, and non-ordained theologian. Religious groups that do not submit the annual financial statement or other required information may lose their registration status. The state permits groups not recognised by either royal decree or the registration process, such as the Church of Scientology, to engage in religious practices without public registration. The state does not grant unrecognised religious groups full tax-exempt status, but members may deduct contributions to these groups from their taxes. By law, the Ministry of Immigration and Integration may prevent entry by foreign religious figures who do not already have a residence permit if it determines their presence poses a threat to public order. In such cases, the ministry places the individuals on a national sanctions list and bars them from entry for two years, a period which it may extend. The sanctions list does not apply to EU nationals and residents. This law does not apply to Greenland or the Faroe Islands, but royal decree may enforce it in those territories.

Recognition policy: stipulatory registration – recognised religious groups may perform legal marriage ceremonies, name and baptise children with legal effect, issue legal death certificates, obtain residence permits for foreign clergy, establish cemeteries, and receive various value added tax exemptions. Since January 2023, all recognised religious communities may issue birth, baptismal, and marriage certificates. Members of other religious communities or individuals unaffiliated with a recognized religious group may have birth and death certificates issued by the health authority. The law requires clergy members with legal authorisation to officiate marriages to have an adequate mastery of the Danish language and to complete a two-day course on family law and civil rights administered by the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs. The law also requires that religious workers “must not behave or act in a way that makes them unworthy to exercise public authority.” The government may strip the right to perform marriages from religious workers whom it perceives as not complying with these provisions.

Key restriction tools imposed: excessive informational requirements, localisation of procedures for tax benefits, membership quotas (50 adult members in Denmark; lower quotas are imposed in Greenland and the Faroe Islands), privileges granted to the ELC include funding through state grants and voluntary tax-deductible contributions received through payroll and the monarch must be a member of the ELC, religious communities except the ELC are set to lose the privilege of issuing their own birth, baptismal and marriage certificates.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (not free; restrictions in religious attire particularly burqas and niqabs); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish sufficient provisions for existential recognition, not just legal registration; in order to receive dynamic classification, Denmark would need to establish a recognition agency to manage religious recognition and registration in the country that is independent of government; remove laws and stipulations that violate elements of the Durham principles; revoke membership quotas.

Djibouti, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Islam is the state religion of Djibouti; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2010; the president must swear an Islamic religious oath.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2010 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Djibouti is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Djibouti did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the government of Djibouti mandates that all religious organisations, both those of domestic and foreign origin, register with the Ministry of Interior (MOI) before they can conduct any activities legally in the country. The MOI conducts a lengthy background investigation of the applicant group. The investigation reviews group leadership, religious affiliation, sources of finance, and the group's objectives within the country. Ties to religious groups considered extremist, strong political agendas, and relations with unfriendly foreign nations are factors that could cause a group's application to be rejected. Domestic and foreign Muslim religious groups must also inform the High Islamic Council at the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Waqfs of their existence and intent to operate. Muslim and non-Muslim foreign religious groups must also gain approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to operate in the country. Once approved, every foreign religious group signs a one-year agreement detailing the scope of its activities. Workers from foreign religious groups must purchase an annual residency card, but in a change from the previous requirement, no longer have to obtain work permits. Foreign religious groups must submit quarterly reports to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and renew their agreements every year. The quarterly report details activities, origin of funding for activities, scope of work completed, and identifies beneficiaries. Religious groups may not operate in the interim while awaiting registration. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Waqfs also ensures that imams trained in Islamic institutes abroad follow an interpretation of Islam that aligns with government views on religious tolerance. The High Islamic Council supervises their preaching and provides training to imams who were trained abroad before they begin their duties to ensure they continue to remain in line with the government's interpretation of Islam. The government continued to permit registered non-Islamic groups, comprising Catholic, Protestant, Greek Orthodox, and Ethiopian Orthodox churches, to operate freely, according to Christian leaders. Muslim citizens were permitted to enter Christian churches, although societal pressure continued to discourage conversion. There were no limitations on the importation of religious literature for registered non-Islamic groups. Following a rejection of a request to open a second Ethiopian Orthodox church in late 2022, the government did not register any other Christian or non-Christian groups during the year. The Church of Scientology maintained its registration as a commercial entity. The government subsidised the cost of utilities at certain church properties of registered non-Islamic groups, since it considered these church properties to be part of the national patrimony. Religious groups not registered with the government, including the Ethiopian Protestant and non-Sunni Muslim congregations, continued to operate without government sanction. Shia Muslims remained unable to register. The government continued to allow non-Islamic religious groups to host events and proselytise on the groups' private property but not elsewhere. The government continued to permit a limited number of Christian missionaries to sell religious books and pamphlets at a bookstore in Djibouti City. The government continued to issue visas to foreign Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant clergy and missionaries, but only those belonging to registered religious groups could work in the country or operate nongovernmental organisations. There were an estimated 20–30 foreign religious workers in the country during the year. The government continued to require foreign religious leaders to regularise their status by purchasing an annual residency card for 24,000 Djiboutian francs (\$136). Religiously affiliated NGOs, similar to other NGOs, are only permitted to have two foreign staff while registered religious organizations are not subject to this restriction.

Key restriction tools imposed: broad grounds exist for the denial of registration, excessive background investigation into applicant group leaders, financial sources and group objectives in the country, excessive monitorial requirements (in the form of quarterly reports on activities), groups may not operate in the interim while their registration is being processed, limited agreement, non-recognition of any non-Islamic religion, religion by default (citizens are officially considered Muslims if they do not specifically identify with another religious group), religious groups are not permitted to conduct basic religious activities in the interim of their registration application being processed, separate procedures exist for Islamic and non-Islamic groups. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Waqfs continued to oversee all Islamic matters, including providing imams with their Friday sermons; imams were not permitted to stray from their approved scripts. The government also maintained authority over hiring of imams for all mosques and of mosques' assets. According to ministry representatives, government control and oversight of mosques remained necessary to preclude political activity from mosques and counter what it termed foreign extremist influence.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarcy** (not free; restricted to Islamic and registered Christian groups only); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; non-Islamic forms restricted to private property); **public expression and observance** (not free); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (not free); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

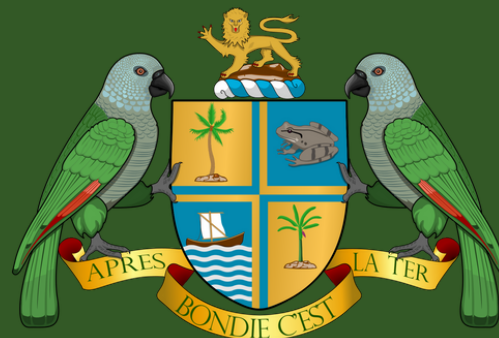
Recommendations

Allow for proselytism for all faiths to take place and for public practice of all religions; de-politicise religious activity; revoke the country's reservation to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights regarding proselytism in public spaces; revoke the mandatory registration rule.



Dominica, Commonwealth of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Dominica is a secular state; however, theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2014.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2014 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Dominica is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Dominica did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatory registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Dominican law mandates that all religious organisations register with the Registrar of Societies section of the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs to operate legally in the country. According to the law, any person who manages, assists in the management of, or holds an official position in an unregistered group is subject to a fine of up to 1,000 pula (\$76) and up to seven years in prison. Individuals who are not in leadership positions in unregistered groups are subject to lower penalties, including fines up to 500 pula (\$38) and up to three years in prison. To register, religious organisations must submit to the Registrar of Societies their constitution. Beyond legal operation, registration also allows religious organisations to conduct business, sign contracts, and open a local bank account. New religious groups must have a minimum of 150 members to register. For previously registered religious groups, the membership threshold remains 10. The Societies Act, amended in 2022 to curb money laundering, requires all societies, including registered religious groups, to reregister with the Registrar of Societies. It also mandates qualification criteria for the officers of registered societies, including pastors, who are required to possess theology certification from a “reputable institution” to ensure that they are qualified to perform their functions.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, a second procedure is imposed for the registration of religious buildings, signature quota (signatures by five group executives), sub-registration. Leaders of some interfaith groups, including the BCC, expressed continuing concern regarding the 2022 amendments to the Societies Act that addressed money laundering, citing a clause in the amended act that stipulates that any member of the clergy who was charged and convicted of any offense should not be appointed to any religious position even after serving his or her sentence. During the year, BCC leadership again expressed the view that churches should not be regulated by the Societies Act and called for the government to develop a separate law that would govern the conduct of all religious groups. In November, President Masisi met with BCC leaders to discuss their concerns in further detail. At year’s end, the government had not agreed to the BCC’s demands but agreed to continue discussions with the organisation. The government continued its policy of requiring all pastors to have a certificate in theology and requiring foreign pastors of some of the unregistered churches to apply for visas, including those from countries whose nationals were normally allowed visa-free entry. In 2019, the government announced it was reviewing the visa policy for foreign pastors, but as of year’s end, there were no new developments. Sources stated there are no known delays with the process of registering foreign pastors, although the government did not make the list of applicants publicly available.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Differentiate between existential recognition from legal registration; establish an independent recognition agency that can manage an established recognition system ectopolitically; remove the elements of the stipulatory registration process which may be applied mandatorily.

Dominican Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Roman Catholic Church was established as the state denomination of the Dominican Republic in 1954 concordat with the Holy See; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2015.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2015 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Dominican Republic is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Dominican Republic voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – non-Catholic religious organisations are not required to register with the Dominican government to legally operate in the country, only to receive customs duties. Non-Catholic religious organisations can only register under the secular designation ‘non-government organisations’ and are not recognised as religious entities. Registration is to be conducted with both the Attorney General’s Office and the Ministry of Finance. Registration with the Attorney General’s Office is a two-step process. The group must provide documentation of a fixed address and the names of seven elected officers, have a minimum of 25 members, and pay a nominal fee. The group must also draft and submit statutes and provide copies of government-issued identification documents for its board of directors. After registering, religious groups may request customs duty exemption status from the Ministry of Finance, which does not always grant it. Only marriages performed by religious groups registered with the Central Electoral Board are legally recognised. To register, the law requires churches to have legal status and be present in the country for at least five years, provide a membership list, and train clergy on how to perform marriages. Churches are responsible for determining the legal qualification of couples, as the law prohibits same-sex marriages as well as marriages of persons younger than 18; churches must record all marriages in the civil registry within three working days of the marriage. According to the law, failure to comply with these regulations may result in a misdemeanour charge, including 100 pesos (\$2) for each day beyond the recording deadline, suspension of a marriage license, or up to five years in prison. Foreign missionaries may obtain a one-year, multiple-entry business visa through the Ministry of Foreign Relations after submitting proof of their affiliation with the relevant religious institution in the country. Foreign missionaries may renew their visa before the original one-year visa has expired.

Recognition policy: the Catholic Church receives special protection from the state in the exercise of Catholic ministry, exemption of Catholic clergy from military service, permission to provide Catholic instruction in public orphanages, public funding to underwrite some church expenses, and exemption from customs duties. Nationally recognised holidays also include days that are traditionally observed only by Catholics. The concordat grants the Catholic Church full access to prisons and the Church is the only religious group legally guaranteed access to prisoners. The government assigns a Catholic priest to every prison and pays his salary. Prisoners of all faiths have the right to practice their religion under a law on the regulation of penitentiary and correctional systems. The 2021 law establishes freedom of religion for all prisoners and prohibits discrimination toward prisoners based on their religion. The law affirms the right of prisoners to receive religious services and seek counseling from officials of their faith. Representatives of non-Catholic groups can access prisons upon request.

Key restriction tools imposed: excessive informational requirements (provision of a membership list), longevity quota, membership quota, second and third procedures as part of the overall registration process are imposed, separate mandatory registration procedure for religious groups that intend to officiate marriages.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierony** (free); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (free); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (free); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (free); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (free); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Democratise the recognition and registration statuses in the country; revoke restrictions involved in the registration process (including excessive informational requirements, longevity quota, membership quota, mandatory registration order, and the second and third procedures).



Ecuador, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Ecuador is officially a secular state; however, the Roman Catholic Church receives privileges from the state due to a 1937 concordat with the Holy See; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2008.

Human rights instruments: Ecuador is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Ecuador voted in favour of the UDHR.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2008 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Ecuadorian religion law and a separate decree both mandate that all non-Catholic religious organisations register with the Ministry of Government. If a religious group wishes to provide social services, it must register under a 2017 executive decree regulating the legal status of civil society organisations (CSOs). However, a religious organisation does not need to register as a CSO and may conduct the processes separately to registering as a religious entity. The Ministry of Government maintains national databases of legally recognized religious organisations and legally recognized CSOs, including religious groups registered as CSOs. An officially registered religious group, whether as a religious organisation or as a CSO, is eligible to receive government funding and exemptions from certain taxes, per the tax code. All religious organisations must be nonprofit and are not required to disclose their financial accounts to the government. To register as a religious organisation, a group must present a charter signed by its founding members to the Ministry of Government and provide information on its leadership and physical location. Registrants may deliver their documentation directly to the Ministry of Government in Quito, to one of the ministry's regional offices, or via email. There is no fee for registration. The Directorate of Registration of Organizations of Worship, Belief and Conscience, which is part of the Undersecretariat for Nationalities, Religious Movements, and Social Organisations and Participation within the Ministry of Government, is charged with reviewing and approving the submitted documentation. To register as a CSO, religious groups submit the same documentation required to register as a religious organisation, as well as approved statutes, a mission statement, and a description of the objectives of the organisation. A religious group registers as a CSO under the government agency overseeing the issues on which the group wishes to work. The Ministry of Government may dissolve a religious group if the group does not maintain legal status or does not adhere to the mission, goals, and objectives listed in its bylaws at the time of registration. Dissolution may include liquidation of physical property and be voluntary – in which case, the religious group could decide to whom to transfer its property – or forced, in which case the ministry would confiscate the group's property. Foreign missionaries and religious volunteers must apply for a temporary residence visa and present a letter of invitation from the sponsoring organisation, which may be foreign or domestic but must have legal status in the country, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The letter must include a commitment to cover the applicant's living expenses and detail the applicant's proposed activities. Applicants also must provide a certified copy of the bylaws of the sponsoring organisation and the name of its legal representative as approved by the government. Ministry of Government records showed 5,567 religious groups as registered during the year, compared with 5,433 groups in 2022. A ministry official reported registration processing times averaged 30 days, and said no religious organisation was denied registration or suspended during the year. The official said the Ministry of Government, through its Directorate of Registration of Organizations of Worship, Belief and Conscience, developed several tools that facilitated the registration process and sought to eliminate potential bias when receiving and evaluating registration requests. These included a publicly available list of requirements for religious organisations seeking to obtain legal status, updated forms available on the ministry's website, and instruction manuals for accessing Directorate of Registration services.

Recognition policy: a 1937 concordat with the Holy See accords legal status to the Catholic Church and grants it financial privileges and tax exemptions.

Key restriction tools imposed: mandatory registration policy; in June 2023, a Ministry of Government official said the ministry continued to digitise religious organisations' documents to make the registration process more convenient for end-users. According to Jewish and Muslim leaders, customs regulations, import tariffs, and onerous paperwork continued to hinder the ability to import kosher and halal foods, beverages, and plants. A Jewish leader said the law treated religious communities the same as companies because all imports, including those for religious purposes, were taxed and treated as commercial items.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (not free; subject to registration); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Differentiate between existential recognition and legal registration; establish procedures for the former as well as the latter; expand the Secretariat into a recognition agency that is independent of government; remove instances of ambiguity within the legislation, set up procedures for multi-level recognition and revoke the mandatory registration order.



Egypt, Arab Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious



ForRB Claim: Partial claim is made.

Secularity: Islam is the state religion of Egypt; government recognition is granted to Christianity, Judaism and Sunni Islam; al-Azhar and the Coptic Orthodox Church have influence over the recognition of new Muslim, Christian and Jewish organisations; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2014.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2014 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Egypt is party to the ICCPR (but with a reservation based on sharia), the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Egypt voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: discriminatory mandatory registration – only religious organisations the Egyptian government considers to be Islamic, Christian or Jewish may gain access to the process for legal status so that groups can be governed by their own canonical laws, practice religious rituals, establish houses of worship, and import religious literature. Egyptian law refers to registration as official recognition and religious organisations allowed access must a request to the Administrative Affairs Department within the Ministry of the Interior. The department then determines whether the group poses a threat to national unity or social peace. As part of this determination, the department consults leading religious institutions, including the Coptic Orthodox Church and al-Azhar. The President then reviews and adjudicates the registration application. The government, through the Ministry of Awqaf, appoints, pays the salaries of and monitors imams who lead prayers in licensed mosques. According to the law, penalties for preaching or giving religious lessons without a license from the Ministry of Awqaf or al-Azhar include a prison term of up to one year, a fine of up to 50,000 EGP (\$1,600), or both. The penalty doubles for repeat offenders. Ministry of Awqaf inspectors also have judicial authority to arrest imams for violating this law. A ministry decree prevents unlicensed imams from preaching in any mosque, prohibits holding Friday prayers in mosques smaller than 80 square meters (860 square feet), bans unlicensed mosques from holding Friday prayer services (other prayer services are permitted), and pays bonuses to imams who deliver Friday sermons written and disseminated by the Ministry of Awqaf. Ministry personnel monitor Friday sermons in major mosques and an imam who fails to follow the guidelines for ministry sermons may lose the bonus and be subject to disciplinary measures, including potentially losing his preaching license. The Prime Minister has the authority to stop circulation of books that “denigrate religions,” referring to the three recognised Abrahamic faiths. Ministries may obtain court orders to ban or confiscate books and works of art. The cabinet may ban works it deems offensive to public morals, detrimental to religion, or likely to cause a breach of the peace. The Islamic Research Academy of al-Azhar has the legal authority to censor and confiscate any publications dealing with the Quran and the authoritative Islamic traditions (sunnah) and to confiscate publications, tapes, speeches, and artistic materials deemed inconsistent with Islamic law. A 2016 law delegates the power to issue legal permits and to authorise church construction or renovation to governors of the country’s 27 governorates. The governor must respond within four months of receipt of an application for legalisation; any refusal must include a written justification. The law does not provide for review or appeal of a refusal, nor does it specify recourse if a governor fails to respond within the required timeframe. The law also includes provisions to legalise existing unlicensed churches. It stipulates that while a request to license an existing building for use as a church is pending, the use of the building to conduct church services and rites may not be prevented. Legalisation becomes final only when the approved churches comply with provisions of structural soundness and civil defense (safety) conditions, prove land ownership, and pay the required administrative fees. Under the law, the size of new churches continues to depend on a government determination of the “number and need” of Christians in the area. Construction of new churches must meet specific land registration procedures and building codes and is subject by law to greater government regulation than that applied to the construction of new mosques. Under a separate law governing the construction of mosques, the Ministry of Awqaf reviews and approves building permits. A 2001 cabinet decree includes a list of 10 provisions requiring that new mosques built after that date must, among other conditions, be a minimum of 500 meters (1,640 feet) from the nearest other mosque, have a ground surface of at least 175 square meters (1,884 square feet), and be built only in areas where “the existing mosques do not accommodate the number of residents in the area.” The law does not require Ministry of Awqaf approval for mosque renovations.

Recognition policy: only religions recognised by the government may legally engage in the public practice of their religion and build places of worship. The constitution defines al-Azhar, the main authority on theology and Islamic affairs, as “an independent scientific Islamic institution with exclusive competence over its own affairs. It is responsible for preaching Islam and disseminating the religious sciences and the Arabic language” worldwide. The constitution requires the state to provide “sufficient funding for it to achieve its purposes.” Al-Azhar’s Grand Imam is elected by al-Azhar’s Council of Senior Scholars and is officially appointed by the President for a life term. The President does not have the authority to dismiss him. Al-Azhar has been deemed by the Council of State, an independent judicial body that gives legal advice to the government and drafts legislation, as the final arbiter regarding licensing of audio and audiovisual productions related to Islam. Courts also seek al-Azhar’s opinion in cases of blasphemy. Its consent is a precondition for other Muslim religious groups to practice their religious rituals openly. The constitution stipulates the canonical laws of Jews and Christians form the basis of legislation governing their personal status, religious affairs, and selection of spiritual leaders. Individuals are subject to different sets of personal status laws regarding such matters as marriage, divorce, and inheritance depending upon their official religious designation. The Ministry of Interior issues national identity cards for citizens that include official religious designations. Designation options are limited to “Muslim,” “Christian,” or “Jewish.” Although the government designates Jehovah’s Witnesses as “Christian” on identity cards, a presidential decree bans their religious activities. Since a 2009 court order, Baha’is and other citizens belonging to unrecognized religious groups may have their religious affiliation denoted by a dash (“-”) on national identity cards. The Minister of Interior has the authority to issue executive regulations determining what data national identity cards must list. The government recognises only the marriages of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim citizens, with documentation from a cleric, and does not recognise civil marriages between Egyptian citizens. Official guidance from the Ministry of Justice stipulates that “the law prohibits marriage to an atheist.” The government does not recognise marriages of Baha’is or individuals from other unrecognized religious groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Hindus, and members of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation in favour of recognition rather than registration, prohibition of the Baha’i Faith and Jehovah’s Witnesses, recognition is restricted to only Islamic, Christian and Jewish denominations approved by the government (this does not necessarily mean they will be accepted for recognition), there exists broad and ambiguous qualifications for state recognition of a denomination, unrecognized groups are prohibited from conducting some basic religious activities such as importing religious literature, establishing places of worship, practising their rituals freely and openly.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; not prohibited in law but the government prohibits any attempt to convert a Muslim to another religion or irreligion); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Allow for all types of groups to apply for recognition and registration; lift all nationwide religious prohibitions; remove all forms of politicisation of the recognition system.

El Salvador, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: El Salvador is officially a secular state; however, the Roman Catholic Church is given the special privilege in the latest constitution from 2014 automatic recognition which exempts it from registration requirements and government financial oversight; theism was affirmed in the 2014 constitution.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2014 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: El Salvador is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; El Salvador voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Salvadorian law allows religious organisations to operate without needing to register with the government, however, registration is required to obtain tax-exempt status and allows registered organisations to obtain an official permit for building a place of worship. To register, a religious group must apply through the Office of the Director General for Nonprofit Associations and Foundations (DGFASFL) in the Ministry of Governance. The group must present its constitution and bylaws describing the type of organisation, location of its offices, its goals and principles, requirements for membership, functions of its ruling bodies, and assessments or dues. The DGFASFL analyses the group's constitution and bylaws to ensure both comply with the law. Upon approval, the government publishes the group's constitution and bylaws in the official gazette. The DGFASFL does not maintain records on religious groups once it approves their status, and there are no requirements for renewal of registration. By law, the Ministry of Governance has the authority to register, regulate, and oversee the finances of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and all religious groups except the Catholic Church, due to the latter's special legal recognition under the constitution. Foreign members of religious groups must obtain special residence visas for religious activities, including proselytising, and may not proselytise while on visitor or tourist visas. Religious groups must be registered to be eligible for their members to receive this special residence visa for religious activities. The Ministry of Governance reported there were 449 requests for registration of religious groups during the year, compared with 312 in 2022. Of these, the ministry approved 177 requests and denied 54 because of incomplete documentation; 208 applications remained under review as of December 22. In 10 cases, the applicants requested the suspension of their application. The Ministry of Governance reported that although the registration process was available electronically, many religious groups did not present the required documents in a timely manner. According to the ministry, delays in registration approvals occurred because religious groups were first required to submit documentation, and the paperwork they submitted to the ministry was incorrect or incomplete.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, Catholic organisations are exempt from registration which creates a discriminatory and vertical registration system (verticalism), many registration applications remain pending hence delaying some group's the ability to exercise the full range of activities granted through registration, according to religious groups, authorities did not restrict church services and religious gatherings under the 2022 State of Exception.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish sufficient procedures for existential recognition; equalisation of recognition statuses and the revocation of state privilege; benefits should be available to all groups; dismantle the vertical registration system.

Equatorial Guinea, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Equatorial Guinea is officially a secular state; however, a degree of state privilege is granted to the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformed Church of Equatorial Guinea as they are exempted from having to register; the Roman Catholic Church is also the only religion to receive state funding for operating educational institutions; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2012.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2012 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Equatorial Guinea is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Equatorial Guinea was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Equatorial Guinea did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Equatorial Guinean law mandates that all new religious organisations must register with the Ministry of Justice, Religious Affairs, and Penitentiary Institutions (MJRAPI). In addition to Catholics and Calvinists, Methodist, Islamic and Baha'i groups are exempt from having to undergo this annual re-registration as these groups hold the status of 'permanent presidential authorisation.' To register, religious groups at the congregational level must submit a written application to the MJRAPI director general of religious affairs. Groups seeking to register must supply detailed information about the leadership and membership of the group, construction plans for religious buildings, property ownership documents, accreditations, and a mission statement from the religious organisation's headquarters, and must pay a fee of 500,000 Central African francs (CFA francs) (\$840). In addition, all leaders of churches must present a certificate of theology or religious studies from an internationally recognised institution of higher education, and the National University of Equatorial Guinea (UNGE) must issue an equivalent certificate for them. The director general of religious affairs adjudicates these applications and may order an inspection by the MJRAPI before processing. The government may fine or shut down unregistered groups. The law requires a permit for door-to-door proselytising. An MJRAPI decree specifies that any religious activities taking place outside the hours of 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. or outside of registered places of worship require preauthorisation from the ministry. The decree prohibits religious acts or preaching within private residences if those acts involve persons who do not live there. Foreign religious representatives or authorities must obtain advance permission from the MJRAPI to lead or speak at religious activities, and sometimes must provide the text of their remarks for MJRAPI approval in advance. Such permission is not required simply to attend services. The MJRAPI permission is usually granted for the duration of the foreign religious representative's visit to the country. The decree exempts the Catholic Church. The government recognises official documents issued by authorised domestic or foreign religious groups, such as birth certificates and marriage certificates. Most foreigners, including foreign evangelical Christian missionaries, are required to obtain residency permits to remain in the country. Applicants must pay 400,000 CFA francs (\$680) every two years for such residency permits (which are separate from group registration permits) and renew their permits annually. The residency permit fee for foreign missionaries is the same as for other foreigners. Catholic missionaries are exempt from the residency permit requirement. Minister of Justice, Religious Affairs, and Penitentiary Institutions Sergio Abeso, who took office in February, continued to enforce the 2021 registration requirements for religious groups. Leaders of evangelical Christian churches continued to say that the regulations adversely affected them disproportionately, because Catholic churches remained exempt from the requirements, Muslim communities operated under a presidential authorisation, and other religious communities were too small to bear the administrative and financial cost to register new entities. Minister of Justice, Religious Affairs, and Penitentiary Institutions Sergio Abeso, who took office in February, continued to enforce the 2021 registration requirements for religious groups. Leaders of evangelical Christian churches continued to say that the regulations adversely affected them disproportionately, because Catholic churches remained exempt from the requirements, Muslim communities operated under a presidential authorisation, and other religious communities were too small to bear the administrative and financial cost to register new entities. Religious groups in the country, especially evangelical and Pentecostal, continued to criticise the government's registration regulations and practices, including the requirement for a certificate from the UNGE and what they stated was the government's tendency to announce changes to registration requirements suddenly and without consultation. Some evangelical Christian churches, which lodged a formal complaint with the MJRAPI in 2022 concerning the registration requirements, continued to discuss the requirements with the MJRAPI director general and Minister Abeso throughout the year. They said that because UNGE did not have a theological faculty to offer the certificate required for foreign missionaries, some missionaries and their families had been forced to leave the country. Evangelical Christian leaders also said the MJRAPI enforced regulations inconsistently and "according to a political agenda." The Federation of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches said that some churches that were reported to the MJRAPI for abusive or inappropriate practices were allowed to operate while other churches that complied with the law and regulations were shut down. Conversely, sources stated that the MJRAPI had more limited influence over the Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformed Church of Equatorial Guinea, which were not required to register, as well as the larger religious groups that held permanent authorisations, since the authorisations stemmed from the President's office and not from the ministry. In September 2023, the government ordered the closure of six evangelical and Pentecostal churches because they failed to comply with registration requirements. In addition, local Malabo authorities and local communities registered numerous complaints about the six churches. One church leader said these ranged from noise and nuisance complaints about church activities to accusations of rape, gender-based violence, and child abuse carried out against church members by church leaders. The church leader said the complaints were not filed officially nor investigated by the MJRAPI; some were based simply on complaints from individuals on social media. According to evangelical leaders, persistent negative societal views regarding evangelical Christian churches, including views expressed on government-owned media, also hampered some churches' attempts to reregister. They said because some communities held negative views of evangelical churches, partly based on the media coverage, MJRAPI officials were reluctant to register some churches. During Senate debate in September regarding proposed changes to the law on religious freedom, for example, the government said it needed to "protect the people" by combating the "bad practices of cults and religious confessions" including appropriation of members' property, "terrorism, kidnapping and the trafficking of children." The Senate recommended updating the census of religious groups operating in the country and the locations of their churches, closing any religious facilities that did not permit inspection by government officials or did not comply with the law on religious freedom, suspending the registration of all citizens or foreigners who did not have the required certificate from the UNGE, determining ways to prevent church members and their heirs from being "deceived" into giving their property to a religious group, better regulating the submission of civil or criminal violations by religious groups to the appropriate government authorities, and prohibiting the media from broadcasting "misleading advertising for evangelisation campaigns." The recommendations were transmitted to the executive branch for action. According to various sources, the Senate recommendations, if adopted, likely would restrict the ability of evangelical, Pentecostal, and other minority religious groups to perform their religious practices. Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians continued to report that residency permits were prohibitively expensive, leading some missionaries to risk the consequences of not obtaining or renewing their permits while they remained in the country. Local police reportedly enforced the requirement with threats of deportation and requested a small bribe as an alternative. The president of the national federation of evangelical and Pentecostal churches reported the voluntary departure during the year of some missionaries from Colombia, Mexico, Brazil and Spain due to the difficulty and cost of obtaining residency permits, but precise figures were not available. There were no reports of missionaries being deported during the year. Catholic missionaries did not require residency permits to remain in the country. While the government continued routinely to grant permission for religious groups to hold activities outside of places of worship, with the exception of private homes, it usually denied permits to hold activities outside of the prescribed hours of 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., according to religious leaders. Authorities permitted all religious groups, except the churches closed during the year, to hold services provided they finished before 9 p.m. and did not disturb the peace.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, annual reregistration may be imposed onto newer groups, arbitrary enforcement, permanent authorisations create a vertical registration system (verticalism) as do registration exemptions, registration fee (\$860, up from \$170 the year before) exceeds \$100 threshold set by RoRB standards, registration is made a prerequisite to the legal officiation of marriages in ways customary to the religion, requalification (evangelical Christians, even those already approved, were ordered to submit their theological certificates for government review), unregistration may lead to fines and forced closures.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarchy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (not free; some restrictions imposed); **proselytism** (not free; subject to a permit); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Remove all instances of politicisation from the recognition and its procedures; remove instances of partial recognition; revoke state privileges in order to equalise the procedures for recognition and registration; revoke the existent restrictions on religious activity.

Eritrea, State of

2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Eritrea is officially a secular state; Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Sunni Islam, Catholicism, and Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea are officially recognised denominations.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 1997 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Eritrea is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Eritrea was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Eritrea did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Proclamation 73/1995 in Eritrean law mandates that all religious organisations register with the government or otherwise cease their activities in the country. Proclamation 73/1995, which serves as the guiding law on religious issues, calls for separation of religion and state; outlines the parameters to which religious organizations must adhere, including concerning foreign relations and social activities; establishes an Office of Religious Affairs; and requires religious groups to register with the government or cease activities. Some members of religious groups that are unregistered or otherwise not in compliance with the law reportedly continue to be subject to the former provisional penal code, which sets penalties for failure to register and noncompliance. A revised penal code, pending implementation since 2015, does not directly address penalties for religious groups that fail to register or otherwise comply with the law, but includes a punishment of between one- and six- months' imprisonment and a fine of 5,001 to 20,000 nakfa (\$330 to \$1,300) for "unlawful assembly." The Office of Religious Affairs has authority to regulate religious activities and institutions, including approval of the applications of religious groups seeking official registration. Each application must include a description of the group's history in the country; an explanation of the uniqueness or benefit the group offers compared with other registered religious groups; names and personal information of the group's leaders; detailed information on assets; a description of the group's conformity to local culture; and a declaration of all foreign sources of funding. The Office of Religious Affairs has registered four religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Sunni Islam, the Catholic Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea (affiliated with the Lutheran World Federation). While the Baha'i Faith is not one of the four officially recognized religious groups, the group has applied to register every year since its establishment in the country in 1959 and has "de facto" recognition from the government. A decree requires all other religious groups to submit registration applications and to cease religious activities and services prior to approval. Religious groups must obtain government approval to build facilities for worship. The law does not provide for conscientious objector status for religious reasons, nor are there alternative activities for persons willing to perform national service but unwilling to engage in military or militia activities. The government requires all citizens to obtain an exit visa prior to departing the country. The application requests the applicant's religious affiliation, but the law does not require that information. The law limits foreign financing for religious groups, including registered groups. The only contributions legally allowed are from local followers, the government, or government-approved foreign sources.

Key restriction tools imposed: ambiguous laws on unregistration, long-term detention and imprisonment for members and leaders of unregistered groups, excessive and restrictive informational requirements, ban on all non-Sunni religious activities among Muslims, government continued to deny citizenship to Jehovah's Witnesses (revoked since 1994) for refusing to participate in the referendum that created Eritrea, low registration rate as no addition to the four recognised denominations have been made since 2002, prohibition of all non-Sunni forms of Islam, state control of appointing religious leaders, state preapproval for building places of worship, vertical system (verticalism). Information continued to be extremely limited about those imprisoned for their faith. Many arrests and releases were unreported. The government continued to detain without due process persons associated with unregistered religious groups, occasionally for long periods, and sometimes on the grounds of threatening national security, according to minority religious group members and international NGOs. Their eventual release from detention was sometimes conditioned on a formal renunciation of their faith. In August, an executive from VOM Canada said minority religious group members "simply disappeared" into the country's prison system. He said Christians from unregistered groups, especially, were often depicted by the government as "not patriotic and not good citizens." Another international NGO official said in January that unregistered Christians who continued to worship were treated as "enemies of the state" by the government. In March, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada al-Nashif said that the "harassment and arbitrary detention of people because of their faith continued unabated" in the country, with "hundreds of religious leaders and followers affected." Government authorisation remained necessary for any organization to print and distribute documents; for religious groups, that authorisation needed to come from the Office of Religious Affairs, which continued to approve requests only from the four officially registered religious groups. Government restrictions on registered and unregistered religious groups remained in place regarding proselytising, accepting external funding from international NGOs and international organizations, and groups selecting their own religious leaders. Unregistered religious groups also faced restrictions in gathering for worship, constructing places of worship, and teaching their religious beliefs to others, although they reported that in many cases the government unofficially allowed them to worship in private homes as long as it was done discreetly. Official attitudes differed toward members of unregistered religious groups worshipping in homes or rented facilities. According to VOM Canada, the government actively sought to infiltrate unregistered churches and imprison their leaders. Some local authorities reportedly tolerated the presence and activities of unregistered groups, while others attempted to prevent them from meeting. The government, which has not approved the registration of additional religious groups since 2002, again approved no new religious groups during the year. Unrecognized religious groups expressed fear that applying would open them to further repression. Jehovah's Witnesses remained largely unable to obtain official identification documents, which left many of them unable to study in government institutions and barred them from most forms of employment, government benefits, access to bank accounts, and travel. Local authorities sometimes denied government ration coupons to Jehovah's Witnesses and members of Pentecostal groups because members of those unregistered groups were not issued government ID cards. Most places of worship unaffiliated with the four officially registered religious groups remained closed to worship, but many of those buildings remained physically intact and undamaged. The government continued to permit the last Jew known to remain in the country to maintain the synagogue in Asmara as a historic site. The Greek Orthodox church remained open as a cultural building, and members of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church sometimes held religious services at the site. Other structures belonging to unregistered groups, such as the Church of Christ, remained shuttered. The government allowed the Baha'i center in Asmara to remain open, and members of the center had unrestricted access to the building. A Baha'i temple outside of Asmara was allowed to operate. There were indications other unregistered groups, including Seventh-day Adventists, operated to some degree. The Anglican church building held services, but only under the auspices of the registered Evangelical Lutheran Church. Government control of all mass media, as well as a fear of imprisonment or other government actions, continued to restrict the ability of unregistered religious group members to bring attention to government actions against them, according to observers. Restrictions on public assembly and freedom of expression severely limited the ability of unregistered religious groups to assemble and conduct worship in a designated place of worship, according to group members.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hieronymy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Reduce the informational requirements imposed on groups; revoke the mandatory registration law and other restrictions placed on the recognition system such as the ambiguous laws on unregistration, the government's refusal to recognise or register any new religious groups, vertical recognition system and state preapproval of religious buildings.

Estonia, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Estonia is a secular state; culturally, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church is still recognised as the national church.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2015 against discrimination on the basis of religion but only prohibits religious discrimination in the area of employment.

Human rights instruments: Estonia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Estonia did not vote on the UDHR; Estonia is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Estonian law does not mandate that religious organisations register with the government in order to operate legally. The law also defines ‘religious associations’ as churches, congregations, unions of congregations, and monasteries. The law also requires ‘religious associations’ to have a management board which holds the right to invite a minister of religion from outside the country. At least half the members of the management board must reside in the country, in another member state of the European Economic Area, or in Switzerland. The elected or appointed superior of a monastery serves as the management board for the monastery. A separate legal designation are ‘religious societies’ which are defined as voluntary organisations whose main activities include religious or ecumenical activities relating to morals, ethics, and cultural and social rehabilitation activities outside the traditional forms of religious rites of a church or congregation. Religious societies do not need to affiliate with a specific church or congregation. The registration office of the Tartu County Court registers all religious associations and religious societies. To register, a religious association must have at least 12 members, and its management board must submit a notarised or digitally signed application, the minutes of its constitutive meeting, and a copy of its statutes. The law treats registered religious associations as nonprofit entities entitled to some tax benefits, such as a value-added tax exemption, if they apply for them. The law does not prohibit religious activities by unregistered religious associations. Unregistered religious associations, however, may not act as legal persons. Unlike registered religious associations, unregistered associations are not eligible for tax benefits. Religious societies are registered according to the law governing nonprofit associations and are entitled to the same tax benefits as religious associations. To register as a nongovernmental association (NGO), a religious society must have a founding contract and statutes approved by its founders, who may be physical or legal persons. The minimum number of founders is two. The society must submit its registration application either electronically or on paper to the Tartu County Court registry office. During the year, the government registered two new religious organizations, the Estonian Islamic Shura Council Dar al-Iftaa Congregation and the Pentecostal Worship Congregation in Estonia, as NGOs in its official registry. According to MOI official data, there are more than 600 religious associations registered with the government.

Recognition policy: the MOI granted €672,011 (\$743,000) to religious associations, of which the ECC received the largest amount, €530,000 (\$586,000) or approximately 8 percent less than in 2022. The council comprises 10 Christian churches, including the Lutheran Church and both the EOCMP and the AEOC, and encompasses the country’s largest Christian communities. In addition to the ECC, the MOI provided smaller grants to the Jewish Community, the Muslim Community, and the EELK for diaspora work among Estonians abroad. The government continued to fund ecumenical activities, including Estonian Broadcasting Company’s ecclesiastical broadcasts, the work of churches to support youth, activities promoting inter-religious dialogue, and religious publishing. In May, the government ended its 1995 agreement with the EELK to establish a joint commission to discuss cultural, social, educational, and legal issues. The Interior Minister stated because there is no state church, the government cannot favor one over another. The ECC includes the EELK and continued to consult with the government on various issues.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, lack of autonomy on management structure for registered organisations, membership quotas.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Ensure that both traditional religious groups and NRMs are given the appropriate support they require to establish themselves in the country, not in any way hinder by unnecessary government restrictions; established differentiation between recognition and registration; streamline the levels of recognition in order to ensure the equitability of the procedures and the status they grant; to be classified Dynamic, establish a recognition agency independent of government; revoke the membership quotas currently imposed.

Eswatini, Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Eswatini is officially a secular state; however, state privilege is granted to Zionist Christianity as indicated by the law mandating Christian instruction in schools but banning the teaching of other religions, separating registration procedures for Christian organisations and unequal treatment of non-Christian groups in the process for constructing a place of worship; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2005; theism is also affirmed in the oath of allegiance.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 2005 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Eswatini is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Eswatini did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad-discriminatory mandatory registration – Eswatini law mandates that all religious organisations register with the government to operate legally in the country. Similar to other countries in southern Africa, Eswatini registration law follows an ‘umbrella religious body’ structure. Christian organisations are obliged to register with one of the country’s three umbrella religious bodies, namely, League of Churches, the Swaziland Conference of Churches, or the Council of Swaziland Churches. One of these umbrella religious bodies must provide a recommendation but, according to church leaders, this is routinely granted and does not impede registration. The application process requires a group to provide its constitution, membership, and physical location, along with the relevant umbrella body’s recommendation, to the MCIT, which then registers the organisation. All legal entities, whether for-profit, non-profit, religious or non-religious, must register with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade (MCIT). For Indigenous religious groups and non-Christian religious organisations, authorities consider proof of a religious leader, a congregation, and a place of worship as sufficient grounds to grant registration. Registered religious groups are exempt from taxation, but contributions are not tax deductible. The government does not disclose the numbers and types of religious groups registered. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is responsible for the oversight of religious groups, once they have successfully registered with the MCIT. Religious groups must obtain permission from the relevant local government to construct new buildings in urban areas. In rural areas, prospective builders must obtain permission from the appropriate chief and chief’s advisory council. In some rural communities, chiefs have designated special committees to allocate land to religious groups for a fee. The government registered some religious groups during the year but did not disclose how many were registered, nor their identities. Some religious groups continued to say that registering via the MCIT was unwieldy, bureaucratic, and subject to excessive processing times, prompting some groups to simply not register. In contrast, religious groups continued to say the MHA provided professional assistance and oversight of religious affairs in the country and acted in the interests of faith communities and churches. The government continued to require all faith groups, including Christians, to obtain advance permission from local traditional authorities (*umphakatsi*) or municipal offices to hold major events, such as all-night prayer vigils or public days of prayer. Authorities continued to review events for potential security risks. According to religious leaders, these procedures constituted restrictions on these common and popular activities, but there were no reports of groups being denied permission to hold events. Some religious leaders continued to say, however, that delays in obtaining government permission for their activities were unreasonable and sometimes only resolved by bribing the relevant civil servants whom they believed delayed and denied applications, with tacit support from their superiors, until a bribe was paid. Some groups said they opted not to request permission to hold public events, or canceled events already scheduled, because they did not want to attract unwanted attention. For example, Islamic leaders scheduled a public discussion of the Hamas-Israel conflict in Gaza to take place at an Islamic community center on 3rd November 2023, but canceled it themselves, when the King announced that a Sibaya or national “peoples’ parliament” would take place on the same day. Islamic leaders said they made the decision out of respect, to avoid appearing to compete for attention with the King. Religious groups reported unequal treatment by municipal bureaucracies in their requests to erect buildings in urban areas. Hindu groups, for example, said they have not requested authorisation to build facilities because of the level of government scrutiny they felt they would face. There are no Hindu temples or structures in the country, and Hindus worshipped in family groups in homes.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, registration procedures are different for Christian and non-Christian groups, registration procedures for Christian groups are oriented around a system of umbrella organisations meaning successful registration is dependent upon a recommendation from one such umbrella bodies, the necessity for a non-Christian registrant group to have a place of worship restricts the registration process because those seeking to build a new place of worship must either obtain permission from the government in urban areas or gain permission from a chief and their advisory council in rural areas (impedimentation).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (not free; government permit required); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (not free; subject to registration); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Differentiate between recognition and registration within the system and provide sufficient procedures for the provision of both; revoke the identified restrictive structures and policies in place on the registration process (e.g. impedimentation).

Ethiopia, Federal Democratic Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Ethiopia is officially a secular state (the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church was disestablished in 1974); however, special privileges in registration procedures are granted to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, which is still recognised as the national church, and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the constitution from 1995 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Ethiopia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Ethiopia was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Ethiopia voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Ethiopian law mandates that all religious organisations must register with the Directorate of Faith and Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Peace. Applicant religious organisations are required to submit a founding document, the national identity cards of its founders, and the permanent address of the religious institution and planned regional branches. The registration process also requires an application letter, information on board members, meeting minutes, information on the founders, financial reports, offices, name, and symbols. Religious groups must have at least 1,000 members to register as a religious entity and 500 for registration as a ministry or association; the rights and privileges are the same for each category. During the registration process, the government publishes the religious group's name and logo in a local newspaper. If there are no objections within 20 working days, registration is granted. Registration with the ministry confers legal status on a religious group, which gives the group the right to congregate and to obtain land to build a place of worship and establish a cemetery. Unregistered groups do not receive these benefits. Religious groups must renew their registration at least once every five years; failure to do so may result in a fine. Unlike other religious groups, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) is not registered by the Ministry of Peace but obtains registration through a provision in the civil code passed in 1960 during the imperial era that is still in force. Registered religious organizations are required to provide annual activity and financial reports. Registered umbrella associations, such as the EOTC and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC), are granted special privileges, with auditing only required every three to five years. Activity reports must describe proselytising activities and list new members, newly ordained clergy, and new houses of worship. Under the constitution, the federal government owns all land; religious groups must apply to both the regional and local governments for land allocation, including for land to build places of worship. While the federal government grants the land, religious groups pay an annual tax to the local government. The tax is determined by the total area of the land and the local tax rates that may differ from zone to zone. If there is a dispute between the religious organisation and the local government on the land they are allocated, or not allocated, the federal government steps in as an intermediary.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, a secondary procedure is mandated for those religious groups conducting humanitarian and development activities which is impermissible because these are included as part of "pastoral services" and are therefore a basic religious activity that should not be subject to registration, mandating that groups list new members as part of monitorial requirements is excessive, membership quotas, the government imposes the public objection restriction tool, the exemption of the EOC from registration creates a vertical system (verticalism), "the right to congregate" is listed as a registration benefit yet this is a basic religious activity that should not be subject to registration.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (not free; subject to registration); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Reduction of the systematic restrictions imposed on religious groups is essential; revoke the mandatory registration rule and other types of restriction tools.

Fiji, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Fiji is a secular state; however, theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 2013 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Fiji is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Fiji was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Fiji did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Fijian law mandates that all religious organisations must register with the government to operate legally in the country. The law requires religious organisations to register through their board of trustees. After registering, religious organisations can operate legally and may also then possess land and property in the organisation's name. Registration is conducted with the Registrar of Titles Office. Applications must include the names and identification of the trustees signed by the head of the religious body seeking registration, a copy of the constitution of the proposed religious body, title documents for the land used by the religious body, and a registration fee of 2.30 Fiji dollars (\$1.00). Registered religious bodies receive exemption from taxes after approval from the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, on the condition they operate in a nonprofit and noncompetitive capacity. By law, religious bodies that hold title to land or property must register their houses of worship, including their land, and show proof of title. The law does not address conditions for religious organisations that do not hold title to land. Permits are required for any public meeting on public property organised by religious groups, except for regular religious services in houses of worship.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, second procedures are established the registration of each building belonging to a religious group in addition to the procedures for registering the group itself. In September 2023, authorities issued a deportation order for several members of the Grace Road Church, a South Korean religious group with more than 700 followers. The group first moved to Fiji in 2014, stating it would be safe there from an imminent apocalypse. The Republic of Korea and Interpol issued an international arrest warrant for the church members in 2018. They were initially arrested by a joint Korean and Fijian force in 2018, but were released shortly after, and their lawyers sought an interim stay on possible deportation at the time. Through its business arm, the Grace Road Group, the church operated farms, restaurants, supermarkets, gas stations, beauty parlours, and a construction firm in Fiji. The church's founder, Shin Ok-ju, was convicted of child abuse, false imprisonment, and assault, and imprisoned in the Republic of Korea in 2019 for holding hundreds of followers captive in Fiji and subjecting them to violence. In September 2023, media outlets reported that the chair of Fiji's Human Rights and Antidiscrimination Commission said members of the Grace Road Church who faced deportation must be given the right to challenge their detention and deportation. The commission had received a complaint from members of the church related to the way some of its members were taken into custody by government officials. The complaint stated that authorities used force during detention, denied Church members access to a lawyer while detained at the Suva Remand Center, labeled the church as a cult, and stated that one member was denied a visa to re-enter Fiji.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (not free; subject to registration); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Remove existent restrictions and clarify ambiguous policies in order to reach the classification Receptive; set up provisions to protect and recognise at multiple levels both traditional groups and NRMs including both existential recognition and legal registration; establish a recognition agency independent of government in order to be classified Dynamic; revoke secondary procedures involved in the registration process.



Finland, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Finland is officially a secular state (the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland was disestablished in 1867 and the Finnish Orthodox Church was disestablished 1917); however, privileges are granted to the Finnish Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELC) and both are still given cultural recognition as national churches.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 2011 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Finland is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Finland did not vote on the UDHR; Finland is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Finnish law does not mandate that religious organisations register with the government in order to operate legally, associate and practise their religion. However, gaining registration is required for religious organisations that wish to obtain government funds with the exception of the ELC and the Finnish Orthodox Church. Registration is conducted with the Patent and Registration Office and the designation is 'religious community.' To register as a religious community, a group must have at least 20 members, the public practice of religion as its purpose, and a set of rules to guide its activities. A registered religious community is a legal entity that may employ persons, purchase property, and make legal claims. A religious group may also acquire legal status by registering as an association with a nonprofit purpose that is not contrary to law or proper behavior. Registered religious communities and nonprofit associations are generally exempt from taxes. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), as of August, there were 169 registered religious communities, most of which had multiple congregations. The ELC and the Orthodox Church are the primary religious institutions in the country. Of the other 167 registered religious communities, 73 are Christian, 57 Islamic, 16 Buddhist, four Hindu, and four Jewish. A total of 13 registered religious communities represented other faiths. According to the MEC, several additional religious communities are organized under the name the Pentecostal Church of Finland but have registered as associations and not as separate religious communities. Similarly, other organisations, such as revivalist congregations of the ELC, have independent theological or functional operations but have remained administratively under the ELC and have not registered as independent religious communities. Persons may belong to more than one religious group. The law requires the ELC to maintain public cemeteries using its general allocation from state funds and church taxes and to account for monies used for this purpose. Other religious communities and nonreligious foundations may maintain their own cemeteries. All registered religious communities may own and manage property and hire staff, including appointing clergy. The law authorises the ELC and Finnish Orthodox Church to register births, marriages, and deaths for their members in collaboration with the government Digital and Population Data Services Agency. State registrars do this for other persons.

Recognition policy: citizens who belong to either the ELC or Finnish Orthodox Church pay a church tax, collected with their income tax payments. Parishes set their respective church tax rates separately. Church tax rates generally fall between 1 to 2.1 percent of a member's income. Those who do not want to pay the tax must terminate their ELC or Orthodox congregation membership. Members may terminate their membership by contacting the official congregation or the local government registration office, either electronically or in person. Local parishes have fiscal autonomy to decide how to use funding received from taxes levied on their members. Registered religious communities other than the ELC and Finnish Orthodox Church are eligible to apply for state funds in lieu of the church tax. In addition to receiving the church tax, the ELC and Finnish Orthodox Church may also apply for state funds. The law states that registered religious communities that meet the statutory requirements, including ELC and Orthodox congregations, may apply to receive an annual subsidy from the government budget in proportion to the religious community's percentage of the population.

Key restriction tools imposed: membership quota, non-recognition for any non-Eastern Orthodox or non-Lutheran religion due to their state privilege, the stipulated qualification that a group must have the "public practice of religion as its purpose" is fairly broad and vulnerable to misuse. On June 13, the Ministry of Justice filed an application to the Supreme Administrative Court to overturn its 2022 decision to register the Blue-Black Movement (Sinimusta Liike), a self-described "radical ethno-nationalist" group with the goal of an ethnically and culturally homogenous Finland, as a political party. The application sought to have the group removed from the country's register of official political parties. On June 20, domestic news outlet Yle reported that the Satakunta District Court found Blue-Black Movement party chair Tuukka Kuru guilty of ethnic incitement for a 2020 tweet in which he suggested the country criminalise Judaism in a social media post on the topic of circumcision. The court fined Kuru €1,280 (\$1,400) and ordered him to delete the offending post. The government continued to provide grants to registered religious communities based on the number of members, and the MEC administered the grants. In 2022, the government allocated €119 million (\$131 million) to the ELC and €2.6 million (\$2.9 million) to the Finnish Orthodox Church. The MEC allotted €824,000 (\$910,000) to all other registered religious organizations. This sum included €674,000 (\$745,000), distributed across communities, based on the number of registered members, and €150,000 (\$166,000) to the Helsinki Jewish Congregation to continue its investments in security at facilities and events, following antisemitic incidents. Leaders of minority religious groups indicated concern regarding the funding allocation, with several Muslim community leaders noting that congregants' lack of cultural understanding of or opposition to registering their religious affiliation affected the amount of funding for the Muslim community. The community leaders noted that many immigrants were not familiar with the practice of registering as members of a religious faith and might refrain from registration based on fear that naming themselves as part of a minority religious community could lead to future religious discrimination. Without the actual number of minority religious community members reflected in the official government register, these communities did not receive the amount of government funding concomitant with their size.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Differentiate between existential recognition and legal registration; remove some minor issues of inequality within the recognition system; revoke the membership quota and policy of non-recognition; to be classified Dynamic, a recognition agency independent of government would need to be established.

French Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: France is a secular state that adheres to the principle of *laïcité* which confines religion to the private sphere; the strictness by which the application of the *laïcité* principle has been applied has grown over time, thus edging France towards hypersecularism (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1905); local law in the region Alsace-Moselle accords official recognition to Judaism, Roman Catholic Church, Lutheranism and Calvinism based on the Napoleonic Concordat of 1801 and so the principle of *laïcité* does not apply in this region.



Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 2008 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: France is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; France voted in favour of the UDHR; France is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – French law does not require that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally and members of unregistered religious groups may practise their religion. However, religious or belief organisations can choose to undergo registration to obtain official recognition from the government and tax-exempt status. Religious groups may register under two categories: ‘associations of worship’, which are exempt from taxes; and ‘cultural associations’, which normally are not exempt. Associations in either category are subject to fiscal oversight by the state. An association of worship may organise only religious activities. Although not tax-exempt, a cultural association may engage in for-profit as well as nonprofit activity and receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations. Religious groups normally register under both categories. For example, Catholics perform religious activities through their associations of worship and operate schools through their cultural associations. Religious groups must apply at the local prefecture (the administrative body, headed by a prefect, that represents the central government in each department) for recognition as an association of worship and tax-exempt status. To qualify as an association of worship, the group’s sole purpose must be the practice of religion, which may include liturgical services and practices, religious training, and the construction of buildings serving the religious group. The association must also engage in public worship and respect public order. Among excluded activities are those that are purely cultural, social, or humanitarian in nature. To apply for tax-exempt status, the association must provide to the prefecture its estimated budget for the year, annual accounts for the previous three years, or since the association’s creation, whichever is shorter, a written justification of eligibility for the status, and the number of members of the association. In Paris, the association must have a minimum of 25 members. Once granted, the association may use the tax-exempt status nationwide. The government does not tax associations of worship on donations they receive. If the prefecture determines an association is not in conformity with its tax-exempt status, however, the government may change that status and require the association to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on past, as well as future, donations until it regains tax-exempt status. According to ministry data more than a decade old, the most recent available, there are 109 Protestant, 100 Catholic, 50 Jehovah’s Witnesses, 30 Muslim, and 15 Jewish associations with tax-exempt status. The number of cultural associations, many of which are not associated with religious groups, is in the thousands and changes frequently. Cultural associations may register using an online form through the government’s public administration website. Cultural associations, even if associated with religious groups, may operate without applying for government recognition, but are not exempt from all taxes. The Church of Scientology has the status of a secular, rather than religious, association. By law, the government may not directly finance religious groups to build new places of worship, except, as noted below, in Alsace-Moselle and overseas departments and territories. The government may, however, provide loan guarantees or lease property to groups at advantageous rates. The law also exempts places of worship from property taxes. The state owns and is responsible for the upkeep of most places of worship, primarily Catholic, built before 1905. The government may fund cultural associations with a religious connection. The law separating religion and state does not apply in three classes of territories. In Alsace-Moselle, Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Jews may choose to allocate a portion of their income tax to their religious group. Pastors, priests, and rabbis of these four recognized faiths in Alsace-Moselle receive a salary from the Interior Ministry, and the country’s President, with the agreement of the Holy See, appoints the Catholic bishops of Metz and Strasbourg. The Prime Minister appoints the Chief Rabbi and the presidents of the Jewish and Protestant consistories (the administrative governance bodies of these groups) in Alsace-Moselle, and the Minister of Interior appoints priests and ministers of three Christian churches (Catholic, Lutheran, and the [Calvinist] Protestant Reformed Church of Alsace and Lorraine) in the region. Local governments in the region may also provide financial support for constructing religious buildings. The Overseas Department of French Guiana may provide subsidies to the Catholic Church. Other overseas departments and overseas territories, which include island territories in the Caribbean and the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans and several sub-Antarctic islands, may also provide funding for religious groups. This provision also applies to the portion of Antarctica the government claims as an overseas territory.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, informational requirements could be subject to misuse against unfavoured groups, membership quota (applied in Paris only), provincialisation of registration procedures, state definition of religion established through the stipulation of ambiguous qualifications for registration, the MIVILUDES has excessive authority to designate religions as ‘cults’.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; reported cases of government interference with some groups, primarily Jehovah’s Witnesses); public expression and observance (free; however, restrictions on religious attire in certain industries and for government officials); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Ensure that the French government’s approach is to facilitate developments and religion and philosophy; establish a recognition agency independent of government for the ensuring that existential recognition is provided for; this should allow France to be classified as Dynamic; provisions need to be put in place to ensure existential recognition is bestowed.

Gabonese Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Gabon is a secular state; however, theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2011 although this was recently replaced with The Transition Charter in August 2023.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in The Transition Charter from 2023 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Gabon is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Gabon did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – all religious or belief organisations must register before they may operate legally in Gabon, a law that did not change following the establishment of The Transition Charter in 2023. Registration is handled by the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) which is currently led by the transition president. Registered groups are eligible for exemptions from fees for land use and fees for construction permits. To register, a group must present to the MOI copies of its founding statutes and internal rules, a letter attesting to publication of these documents in the applicable local administrative bulletin, a formal letter of request for registration addressed to the MOI, a property lease, the police records of the group's leaders, and the group's bank statements. The registration fee is 10,000 CFA francs (\$17). Registered religious groups must also provide the MOI with proof of nonprofit status to receive exemptions from local taxes and customs duties on imports. The MOI maintains an official registry of religious groups. Prior to the August 30 coup d'état, the MOI reported it continued to face trouble with "one-man operations", individuals who attempted to register themselves as representing religious groups without justification. The MOI stated then that such individuals, who tended to practice a mixture of Christianity and animism, lacked "authenticity." Religious groups continued to say these individuals appeared to be trying to manipulate the system to get benefits they did not deserve, such as tax exoneration to import items and fee exemptions for residence permits. The MOI reported charging several groups, primarily one-man operations, with fraud or sanctioning them for other illegal activities, with the government using the regulatory framework to attempt to prevent further abuses.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, baseless and mass denials of registration, informational requirements are excessive and could be easily misused to discriminate against groups unfavoured by the state, broad grounds for group deregistration are vulnerable to misuse against those unfavoured groups.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (not free; subject to registration); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish procedures so that existential recognition may be bestowed and then differentiated from legal registration; rectification of the unstructuredness and the ambiguity in the legislation; revoke the mandatory registration order, the excessive informational requirements and stop the misuse of deregistration against religious groups unfavoured by the government.



Gambia, Republic of The

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: The Gambia is officially a secular state; however, state privilege is granted to Islam; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2020.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 2020 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Gambia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Gambia was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Gambia did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory.**

Registration policy: conditional mandatory registration – religious or belief organisations that provide any kind of social service must register with the NGO Affairs Agency but otherwise there are no formal guidelines for the registration of religious groups and otherwise religious organisations are not required to register for members to practise their religion. Faith-based groups that provide the same social services as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) must meet the same eligibility criteria as other NGOs. By law, all NGOs are required to register with the NGO Affairs Agency and as charities at the attorney general's chambers. They are required to have governing boards of directors composed of at least seven members responsible for policy and major administrative decisions, including internal control. The law also requires that all NGOs submit to the NGO Affairs Agency a detailed annual work program and budget, a detailed annual report highlighting progress on activities undertaken during the year, work plans for the following year, and financial statements audited by NGO Affairs Agency approved auditors. The government has stated the submissions help the NGO Affairs Agency monitor NGO activities. The Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs is responsible for issues related to religious affairs in the country.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, membership quota (possibly via a signature quota), the extensive monitorial requirements could be easily misused to the disadvantage of groups unfavoured by the state.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (not free; non-Sunni groups must obtain government approval); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (not free; subject to registration); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that has capacity to bestow both existential recognition and legal registration in differentiation; establish a recognition agency to manage the recognition system; the more independent this agency is from the government the more dynamic the country will become because its system and agency for recognition will not suffer from politicisation; reduce discrimination by educating the public about the importance of religious and belief diversity and promote religious education in schools of all different kinds of communities of belief; revoke the imposed membership quota and signature quota as well as the extensive monitorial requirements.



Georgia

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

ForB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Georgia is officially a secular state (the Georgian Orthodox Church was disestablished in 1921); however, special privileges are granted to the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) as the national church; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2018.

Protections: **Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2018 against discrimination on the basis of religion.**

Human rights instruments: Georgia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Georgia abstained from voting on the UNDRIP; Georgia did not vote on the UDHR; Georgia is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional and malregistration.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious or belief organisations are not required to register to operate legally in Georgia. However, groups have the option of register with the National Agency of the Public Registry (NAPR) either as a legal entity under public law or as a non-commercial entity. Both statuses offer equivalent benefits, including legal recognition, tax exemptions for donations and other “religious activities” (a term not clearly defined by law), and the right to own property and open bank accounts. The civil code defines the activities and rights of denominations registered as legal entities. Unregistered religious groups may conduct religious activities but do not receive the legal status or benefits conferred on registered groups. Unregistered religious groups may have a charter and ownership of property may be based on that charter. The property should be registered with the NAPR. They may maintain a bank account with a commercial bank, based on national bank regulations. Unregistered groups may also invite clergy to the country. To register as a legal entity under public law, the law specifies a religious group must have a historic link with the country or be recognized as a religion “by the legislation of the member states of the Council of Europe.” In its definitions section, the law indicates religions considered “dishonest” or “fictitious” could be denied registration. A religious group must also submit to the NAPR information regarding its objectives and procedures and a list of its founders and the members of its governing body. Religious groups registering as non-commercial entities do not have to demonstrate historic ties to the country or recognition by Council of Europe members but must submit to the NAPR similar information on their objectives, governing procedures, and names of founders and members of their governing body. There is no appeal mechanism for groups that are denied registration as a legal entity under public law, but they may reapply to the NAPR. The state recognises only civil marriages; it does not recognise marriages conducted by the GOC or other religious groups, regardless of their registration status. The law grants the GOC exceptions from several requirements applicable to other religious groups, including payment of taxes on the construction, restoration, and maintenance of religious buildings and payment of taxes on property. It exempts the GOC, but not other religious groups, from taxes on “profit from the sale of crosses, candles, icons, books, and calendars used...for religious purposes.” In addition, the law states only the GOC may acquire nonagricultural state property through a direct sale by the government. Should other religious groups wish to acquire this type of property, they must participate in public tenders. Only the GOC has the right to acquire agricultural state property free of charge; all others must pay a fee. The law grants the church ownership over state forests located near or adjacent to GOC churches and monasteries. According to a Ministry of Justice decree, accused and convicted individuals may meet only with spiritual representatives of the GOC and registered religious organisations. Prison regulations state prisoners have the right to possess and use religious literature and objects of worship. According to NAPR, only two religious groups filed for registration during the year, the Ozurgeti Evangelical Baptist Church and the Christ the Savior Church, and both applications remained pending because the religious groups needed to submit additional documents. NAPR reported the agency did not refuse registration to any religious groups during the year. SARI and some religious groups’ representatives, including members of the Jewish community and the Armenian Apostolic Church, said they remained in favor of drafting a new, broader “law on religion” to define which groups would be eligible for these and other benefits and address issues pertaining to the registration and legal status of religious groups and teaching of religion in public schools. Many civil society representatives and members of other religious groups, including some individuals from the Muslim community, Catholic Church, and Evangelical Baptist Church, remained opposed, arguing such legislation would create a hierarchy of religious groups and allow the government to discriminate against smaller religious communities and increase its leverage over them. Critics of such a law also said it might include new criteria for registration that would be difficult for nontraditional religious groups to meet. In addition, they expressed concern that it would expand the role of SARI, which some smaller groups said they viewed as an entity that promoted government control of religious organizations rather than a protector of religious freedom. They advocated instead making benefits available to all religious groups or to none. No progress toward such a law was reported by media.

Malregistration – with the breakaway states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgian registration law does not apply to all the territories the country claims and so the Georgian government cannot guarantee the ForB of registered religious organisations in these territories with de facto authorities under Russian influence.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, the stipulated qualifications for registered status are intentionally ambiguous to restrict LEPL status, the stipulated qualifications for registered status also invoke the international recognition restriction tool (or internationalism), vertical registration system (verticalism).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Remove ambiguity from the legislation and also revoke subjective requirements; revoke instances of partial recognition to ensure equality within the recognition system; revoke the vertical structure of the registration system.



Germany, Federal Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Germany is officially a secular state; however, special privileges are granted to the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2014.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2014 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Germany is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Germany did not vote on the UDHR; Germany is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – German law allows unregistered religious or belief organisations to operate freely. However, if religious or belief organisations wish to receive tax-exempt status, then they must register under the secular designation ‘nonprofit association.’ State-level authorities review registration submissions and routinely grant tax-exempt status; if challenged, their decisions are subject to judicial review. Those applying for tax-exempt status must provide evidence they are a religious group through their statutes, history, and activities. A special partnership exists between the states and religious groups with PLC status, as outlined in the constitution. Any religious group may request PLC status, which, if granted, entitles the group to levy tithes (8 percent of income tax in Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg (BW) and 9 percent in the other states) on members, who must register their religious affiliation with federal tax authorities. Each state collects the tithes on behalf of the religious community through the state’s tax collection process, separate from and in addition to income taxes. PLCs pay fees to the government for the tithing service, but not all groups with PLC status utilise the service. PLC status also allows for benefits, including tax exemptions (larger than those given to groups with nonprofit status), representation on supervisory boards of public television and radio stations, and the right to special labor regulations. State governments subsidise institutions with PLC status that provide public services, such as religious schools and hospitals. In addition, due to historic “state-church contracts” dating back to before 1919, all state governments except Bremen and Hamburg subsidise the Catholic Church and the EKD with different yearly amounts. According to the constitution, the decision to grant PLC status is made at the state level. Individual states base PLC status decisions on a number of varying qualifications, including an assurance of the group’s permanence, size, and respect for the constitutional order and fundamental rights of individuals. An estimated 180 religious groups have PLC status, including Catholics, the EKD, Alevi Muslims, Baha’is, Baptists, Christian Scientists, Hindus, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jews, Mennonites, Methodists, Church of Jesus Christ, Salvation Army, and Seventh-day Adventists. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat has PLC status in the states of Hesse and Hamburg and the MTO Shahmaghsoudi School of Islamic Sufism has PLC status in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW); no other Muslim communities besides the Alevis have PLC status. The COS does not have PLC or nonprofit status in any state.

Recognition policy: German law permits the federal government to characterise “nontraditional” religious groups – such as the COS – as “sects,” “youth religions,” and “youth sects” and allows the government to provide “accurate information” or warnings about them to the public. The law does not permit the government to use terms such as “destructive,” “pseudo-religious,” or “manipulative” when referring to these groups. Several past court decisions ruled the government must remain neutral toward a religion and may provide a warning to the public only if an “offer” by a religious group would endanger the basic rights of an individual or place the individual in a state of physical or financial dependence.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, excessive authority of the government to label a religion such as Scientology as dangerous, provincialisation (registration procedures are conducted at the provincial rather than federal level in Germany), qualifications for PLC status are vague and ambiguous making them vulnerable to misuse also meaning possible imposition of a membership quota, vertical registration system is instituted (verticalism).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish provisions to bestow existential recognition in addition to the existent legal registration available; revoke the provincially segmented structure of the recognition system to ensure universal bestowal; clarification on this aspect of the system and alterations made to it will raise Germany to Receptive status; revoke the provincialisation procedure in the registration system and its vertical structure; to achieve Dynamic status, a recognition agency would need to be established that is independent of government.

Ghana, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Ghana is a secular state; however, theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 1996.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 1996 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Ghana is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Ghana did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: quasi-mandatory registration – religious or belief organisations are required by law to register with the Office of the Registrar General in the Ministry of Justice, however, there is no penalty for religious groups that operate without registering. Religious or belief organisations that do register receive legal entity status and government recognition. The registration cost for religious groups is slightly lower than the fee for nongovernmental organizations. To register, groups must fill out a form and pay a fee of 270 cedis (\$23). Most indigenous religious groups do not register. According to law, registered religious groups are exempt from paying taxes on nonprofit religious, charitable, and educational activities. Religious groups are required to pay taxes, on a pay-as-earned basis, on for-profit business activities, such as church-operated private schools and universities.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, lack of distinction between the registration of secular and belief-based organisations, the registration fee is undisclosed. The issue of regulating self-styled “pastors” working outside of established ecumenical bodies continued to be debated between legislators and the Christian Council of Ghana, an umbrella group of mainly traditional Protestant denominations. The established religious bodies stated they recognized the concerns that the legislators expressed about the individuals – including allegations of sexual misconduct, false prophecies that caused fear and panic, and financial exploitation of church members – but opposed legislation that would regulate religious practice. The Ghana Charismatic Bishops’ Conference, representing more than 4,000 charismatic churches, reiterated its opposition to any form of legislative or governmental framework.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish provisions for the existential recognition and legal registration of religious and belief distinct from procedures for secular entities; rid the system of any unstructured elements and make clarifications on elements of religious life that have not been specifically addressed in present legislation; publish the registration fee imposed by the state; to become Dynamic, establish a recognition agency independent of government.



Hellenic Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForB Claim: Partial claim is made constrained by the continued prohibition on proselytising.

Secularity: Orthodox Church of Greece is the state denomination of Greece and was described in the latest revised constitution from 2008 as “the prevailing religion in Greece”; theism was also affirmed in the 2008 revised constitution.

Protections: No protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2008 against discrimination specifically on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Greece is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Greece voted in favour of the UDHR; Greece is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – religious or belief organisations are not formally required by Greek law to register with the government to legally begin operations in the country but the right to conduct certain ‘basic religious activities’ is revoked from those that operate unregistered. The constitution states that ministers of all known religions are subject to the same regulations as Greek Orthodox clergy. It states individuals are not exempt from compliance with the law because of religious conviction. Under the law, religious officials of known religions and official religious legal entities must register with the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The Greek Orthodox Church, the Jewish Community of Greece, and the Muslim Minority of Thrace have long-held status as official, religious, public-law legal entities. The Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Rite Catholic Church, Anglican Church, two evangelical Christian groups (the Evangelical Church of German-speakers and the Greek Evangelical Church), and the Ethiopian, Coptic, Armenian Apostolic, and Assyrian Orthodox Churches acquired religious legal-entity status under a 2014 law, which outlines how additional entities can acquire such status. This application process requires documents proving the group has “open rituals and no secret doctrines,” a list of 300 signatory members, a qualified leader who is legally in the country, and proof (e.g., each group’s charter of association) the entity’s practices do not threaten public order. The law provides an alternate method to obtain government recognition: a group with at least one valid permit to operate a place of worship acquires legal protection as a “known religion” and has benefits that include exemption from taxes and municipal fees for property used solely for religious purposes. The terms “houses or places of prayer or worship” are used interchangeably; it is at the discretion of a religious group to determine its term of preference. Membership requirements for house of prayer permits differ from the requirements for official recognition of religious legal entities. Local urban planning departments must certify facilities meet minimum safety standards. Once a house of worship receives the required approvals, the religious group must submit a description of its basic principles and rituals and a biography of the religious minister or leader to the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs for final approval. The application for a house of prayer or worship permit requires at least five signatory group members. The leaders of a religious group applying for a house of prayer permit must be Greek citizens, EU nationals, or legal residents of the country and must possess other professional qualifications, including relevant education and experience. A separate permit is required for each physical location. A religious group qualifying as a religious legal entity may transfer property and administer houses of prayer or worship, private schools, charitable institutions, and other nonprofit entities. Alternatively, some groups have opted to retain their status as civil society nonprofit associations acquired through court recognition prior to the 2014 law. Under this status, religious groups, including Jehovah’s Witnesses and Bahai’s, may operate houses of prayer and benefit from real estate property tax exemptions, but they may face administrative and fiscal difficulties in transferring property and in operating private schools, charitable institutions, and other nonprofit entities. Although properties used exclusively for religious purposes are tax exempt, nonreligious properties owned by religious groups are subject to taxation. The law allows religious communities without status as legal entities to appear before administrative and civil courts as plaintiffs or defendants. During the year, a self-declared ethnic Macedonian practicing an unaffiliated version of Orthodox Christianity (not officially recognized by any other Orthodox Church) continued to seek acquisition of a house of prayer permit. The applicant had sought a permit for a house of prayer since 2017. In 2022, the ombudsman sent an official inquiry to the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs regarding this case; the ministry said the permit application was missing parts of the required documentation. The applicant contended the government deliberately delayed the process. Groups lacking religious-entity status or a house of prayer permit could still function as registered, nonprofit civil society organizations, but they did not have full rights, such as the right to perform a legal wedding.

Recognition policy: the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne accords the recognised Muslim Minority of Thrace the right to administer and maintain mosques and social and charitable organizations. A 2022 law outlines the process by which the government appoints official muftis in Thrace, including qualification criteria, the selection process, and rules for constituting a decision-making advisory committee. The law stipulates that the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs chooses among candidates recommended by the committee. The final appointment is certified by presidential decree (as is also the case for Greek Orthodox metropolitans).

Key restriction tools imposed: public order narrative tool is invoked, mandatory registration for religious leaders (leader registration), registration requirements disallow multiformism, signature quota, secondary procedure of registration is imposed, vertical recognition system is instituted (verticalism). The constitution prohibits “proselytising,” defined as “any direct or indirect attempt to intrude on the religious beliefs of a person of a different religious persuasion with the aim of undermining those beliefs.” This prohibition is rarely enforced. The constitution prohibits worship disturbing public order or “offending moral principles.” It allows prosecutors to seize publications that “offend Christianity” or other “known religions,” which are defined as groups with at least one valid permit to operate a place of prayer or worship.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (not free; restricted); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; restricted); pastoral services (not free; restricted); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; prohibited though this law is dormant); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (not free; restricted); religious buildings (not free; restricted); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (not free; subject to state supervision and possibly subject to registration); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Equalise all provisions by the registration system; establish provisions for existential recognition; revoke dormant laws on proselytism, signature quota, the secondary procedure involved in the registration system and the mandatory registration order.

Grenada

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Grenada is a secular state; however, theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1992.

Protections: **Implicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 1992 against discrimination on the basis of religion.**

Human rights instruments: Grenada is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Grenada was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Grenada did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious or belief organisations are not required to obtain recognition from the government to operate legally in the country. However, religious or belief organisations must register to qualify for customs and tax exemptions. The group must also register with the Corporate Affairs and Intellectual Property Office (CAIPO) and with the Inland Revenue Office in the Ministry of Finance, to which it must submit a letter of request. The Attorney General grants final approval, and the ministry grants applications for tax exemptions; these are approved routinely. To be recognised as an NGO, the group must submit details to CAIPO regarding the organisation, including information about its directors, as well as a description of the group's general activities and the location of these activities. According to 2011 government statistics, the most recent available, and information from CAIPO, there are approximately 20 religious groups registered in the country. As part of the visa process, foreign missionaries must apply to the Ministry of Labor for a work permit costing 500 East Caribbean dollars (ECD) (\$185), along with an application fee of 100 ECD (\$37); the permit must be renewed annually. To be approved, foreign missionaries must demonstrate prior experience, and a registered religious group must sponsor them.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, three different registration submissions have to be made (multi-registration).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish distinct provisions for religious entities in terms of both their existential recognition and their legal registration apart from secular entities; revoke the multi-registration structure of the present system; to become Dynamic, a recognition agency needs to be established that is independent of government.



Guatemala, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Guatemala is officially a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1871); however, the latest constitution from 1993 recognises the distinct legal personality of the Roman Catholic Church; theism was affirmed in the 1993 constitution.

Protections: Implicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 1993 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Guatemala is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Guatemala voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although the Guatemalan constitution does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government for the “purpose of worship”, unregistered religious organisations cannot sign any kind of legal contract which is likely essential to religious activity. Registration also confers tax-exempt status. However, the Roman Catholic Church receives these benefits automatically without having to register. To register, a religious group must file with the Ministry of Interior a copy of its bylaws, evidence that it is a newly established legal entity that intends to pursue religious objectives, and a list of its initial membership with at least 25 members. The ministry may reject a registration application if it believes the group does not appear to be devoted to a religious objective, appears intent on undertaking illegal activities, or engages in activities that could threaten public order. Most applications are approved after a lengthy process. All religious groups must obtain the permission of the respective municipal authorities for construction and repair of properties and for holding public events, consistent with requirements for nonreligious endeavours. The constitution protects the rights of Indigenous groups to practice their traditions and forms of cultural expression, including spiritual practices. The law permits Mayan spiritual groups to conduct ceremonies at Mayan historical sites on government-owned property free of charge with written permission from the Ministry of Culture. Anyone seeking access to the sites located in national parks or other protected areas, however, is required to pay processing or entrance fees. The law provides for at least one “religious space, according to [the prison’s] capacity,” in each prison. Chaplain services are limited to Catholic chaplains and nondenominational (usually evangelical) Protestant chaplains. The law does not specify that prisons must provide access for prisoners of minority religious groups to spiritual counsellors from their faith. The government requires foreign missionaries to obtain tourist visas to enter the country; visas are renewable every three months. After renewing their tourist visas once, foreign missionaries may apply for temporary residence for up to two years; the residential permit is renewable. According to evangelical Protestant groups, non-Catholic religious groups still had to follow a vaguely defined process involving several steps that could take up to two years and cost approximately 10,000 quetzals (\$1,300) to register with the Ministry of Government and be able to sign any legal contracts or receive tax-exempt status. In May, former president Giammattei signed an executive order to reduce the amount of time it takes religious groups to register. According to Commissioner to the President on Religious Freedom Robin García, it was still too early to determine whether the executive order had led to a reduction in the time required for a religious group to register. Some Mayan leaders maintained that the government limited their access to several religious sites on government-owned property and required them to pay to access the sites, even though the Ministry of Culture approved free access to credentialed Mayan spiritual practitioners. The same leaders said the government did not provide credentials in a timely manner to all practitioners who wished to access the sites. The government continued to deny any access limitations while noting that anyone seeking access to the sites located in national parks or other protected areas had to pay processing or entrance fees. In Tikal, a complex of Mayan pyramids dating from 200 A.D. and one of the most sacred sites for Mayan spirituality, the access fee was approximately 20 to 30 quetzals (\$3 to \$4), which, according to members of COLUSAG, was prohibitive for many Indigenous community members.

Key restriction tools imposed: bilateral cooperation agreements are not made available to all religious groups, broad grounds for the denial of registration, informational requirements are excessive (namely pursuit of “religious objectives” and requirement to list “initial membership”), membership quota is imposed, multi-registration, registration fee (\$1,300) exceeds the amount of \$100 stipulated in RoRB standards, state definition of religion, the ability to rent property for religious purposes is a “basic religious activity” that should not be categorised as a benefit of registration.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Disestablish partial recognition by equalising and streamlining all recognition statuses including that of the Catholic Church; continue to ensure that politicisation of the recognition system does not take place; re-evaluate the rules surrounding mandatory registration for activities other than worship and proselytism; remove any instances of unstructure by clarifying in legislation areas that remain ambiguous or unaddressed; to become Dynamic, establish provisions for both existential recognition and legal registration; also, establish a recognition agency to manage the system independent of government.



Guinea, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Partial claim is made in the 2021 Transition Charter limiting FoRB to freedom of worship.

Secularity: Guinea is a secular state.

Protections: No protection was granted in the 2021 Transition Charter against discrimination specifically on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Guinea is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Guinea did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.



Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the Secretariat General of Religious Affairs (SRA) mandates that it approves all religious or belief organisations intending to operate in Guinea. Such organisations are obliged to send the SRA a written constitution, an application form with the organisation’s address and pay a fee of 250,000 francs (\$30). The SRA then sends the documents to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization for final approval and signature. Once approved, the group becomes officially recognised. Every six months, each registered religious group must present a report of its activities to the government. Registering with the government entitles religious groups to an exemption from the value-added tax (VAT) on imported shipments and makes them eligible for select energy subsidies. Unregistered religious groups are not entitled to VAT exemptions and other benefits. By law, the government may shut down unregistered groups and expel their leaders. There is limited opportunity for legal appeal of these penalties. Religious groups may not own radio or television stations. The imams and administrative staff of the principal mosque in Conakry and the principal mosques in the main cities of the country’s four regions are government employees. These mosques are directly under the administration of the government. The government subsidises both Muslim and Christian pilgrimages in accordance with the law. The SRA appoints national directors to lead the Offices of Christian Affairs, Islamic Affairs, Pilgrimages, Places of Worship, Economic Affairs, the Endowment, and Inspector General, which all fall under the SRA. The SRA is charged with promoting good relations among religious groups and coordinates with other members of the informal Inter-religious Council, which is composed of the SRA and representatives from the Islamic faith and the Catholic, Anglican, and other Protestant churches. The SRA continued to issue guidance outlining themes for discussion during Friday sermons at mosques and Sunday sermons in churches. The stated purpose of the weekly guidance was to harmonise religious views to prevent radical or political messages in sermons. Although the SRA did not monitor sermons at every mosque and church, its inspectors continue to be present in every region and were responsible for ensuring that mosque and church sermons were consistent with SRA directives. On 30th June 2023, the administrative authorities of the Labe Region in the central part of the country summoned a group of 12 imams for leading the Eid al-Adha prayer on June 29 instead of the official date set by the SRA of June 28. Officers of the Judicial Police of the gendarmerie interrogated the imams for more than seven hours, which they said was to determine the reasons that led them to disobey the SRA instructions. There was little information on how the SRA would implement its December 2022 order governing the regulation, allocation, and operation of decentralised religious institutions, including regional inspections and the creation of prefectural and sub-prefectural secretariats for mosques, Quranic schools, and religious NGOs. In August 2023, the SRA issued a circular letter requesting all nongovernmental organizations and religious associations to register with the regional inspections and prefectural Secretariats for Religious Affairs, and in the Special Zone of Conakry with the Municipal Secretariats, from August 21 to November 20. The stated objective of this initiative was to compile a list of all NGOs and religious associations operating within the national territory for better collaboration with the government. According to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Baha’i National Spiritual Assembly, the Baha’i community refrained from engaging in political debates and consistently followed government directives, in line with the Baha’i principle of loyalty to authorities. Jehovah’s Witnesses reported that their registration renewal application, which had been delayed in 2022, was approved during the year. The government sponsored the travel of 10,344 Muslims on the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, and the travel of approximately 193 Christians, including 142 Catholics and 51 evangelical Christians, on pilgrimage travel to Israel and nearby areas. The subsidies totalled 30 billion francs (\$3.5 million) for Muslim travel and approximately 2.4 billion francs (\$282,000) for Christian travel.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, arbitrary enforcement, dual registration, imposing monitorial requirements every six months is impermissible to RoRB standards which stipulate that monitorial requirements should only be imposed on an annual basis, there is limited opportunity for legal appeal of penalties issued, the SRA retains control over sermon content, unregistration can lead to the forced closure of groups and the deportation of any foreign nationals involved in the group, especially foreign religious leaders, processing delays for registration applicants.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; religious may not own radio or television stations); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Dismantle existent policies that restrict religious activity or place barriers during the registration process; establish sufficient provisions for existential recognition not just legal registration; revoke the rule of mandatory registration; use recognition to promote diversity and to improve religious education.

Guinea-Bissau, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Guinea-Bissau is a secular state.

Protections: Implicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 1996 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Guinea-Bissau is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Guinea-Bissau was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Guinea-Bissau did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the government mandates that religious or belief organisations obtain licenses to operate legally in Guinea-Bissau. The formal process, which is not often followed, entails providing the name, location, type, and size of the organisation to the Ministry of Justice. Under the law, religious groups are recognized as associations. The state provides tax exemptions for NGOs and religious bodies for importing goods. However, the government continued a suspension of tax exemptions for NGOs and religious bodies on imported goods instituted in September 2022. When the suspension went into effect, the Ministry of Finance stated that the decision was part of the process to survey and balance customs and tax exemptions for all organisations. As of year's end, the suspension remained in effect.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, arbitrary enforcement of registration law, informational requirements requested could easily lead to the implementation of a membership quota. The Pentecostal church Igreja Assembleia De Deus (Assembly of God Church) continued to transmit radio programming beyond the 60-kilometer (36-mile) limit ordered by the Ministry of Transportation and Communications in 2022. The Church asked the government to reconsider its restriction when initially imposed but did not receive a response. There were no repercussions reported for the Church's failure to comply. Other religious leaders had previously stated that Igreja Assembleia promoted division, intolerance, and disrespect toward other religious groups. Igreja Assembleia's leader responded that there was no intent to attack any other religious groups, but that the Church's interpretation of the Bible differed from that of others. The leader also stated that the Church had been criticized for its opposition to forced marriages and its efforts to assist victims of forced marriages.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; religious may not own radio or television stations); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish provisions for existential recognition not just legal registration; establish a clear, authoritative system for religious recognition in order to reach the receptive classification; fix the unstructure present in the legislation by clarifying stances on topics not presently addressed; to become Dynamic, establish a recognition agency to manage the system independent of government.



Guyana, Co-operative Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Guyana is a secular state; however, theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2016 against discrimination on the basis of “creed.”

Human rights instruments: Guyana is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Guyana did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatory of registration: **non-registration.**

Registration policy: indirect registration – there is no official system for formal registration of a religious group, but to receive government recognition, all places of worship must be registered through the Deeds Registry. The Deeds Registry requires an organisation to submit a proposed name and address for the place of worship, as well as the names of executive group members or congregation leaders. Once formally recognised, a place of worship falls under legislation governing nonprofit organisations, allowing the organisation to conduct financial operations, buy property, and receive tax benefits in its name. Foreign religious workers require a visa from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Religious groups seeking to enter an Indigenous village for the purpose of proselytising must apply for and obtain permission from the village council. Application to a village council must include the name of the group, the names of its members who will be going to the village, their purpose, and the estimated date of arrival. Reportedly, however, village councils rarely enforce this requirement. The government continued to maintain regulations limiting the number of visas for foreign representatives of religious groups based on historical trends, the relative size of the group, and the president’s discretion; however, the government and religious groups, whose membership included foreign missionaries, continued to state the government did not apply the visa limitation rule. Religious groups also said the visa quotas the government allotted to them were sufficient and did not adversely affect their activities.

Recognition policy: the constitution mandates the establishment of the ERC, with the purpose of promoting ethnic harmony, eliminating ethnic discrimination, and encouraging respect for religious diversity. The ERC includes representatives of the country’s main religious traditions, including Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Rastafarianism.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, indirect registration, unstructured registration procedures.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; restricted); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a distinct recognition system for different forms and levels of religion and belief; remove all forms of unstructured by clarifying unaddressed topics and issues; revoke the rule of mandatory registration of places of worship and disestablish the present system as being oriented on places of worship; to be classified as Dynamic, a recognition agency would need to be established to manage the recognition system in a way that is independent of the government to ensure no politicisation or manipulation takes place.

Haiti, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Haiti is officially a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1987); however, privileges are granted to the Roman Catholic Church based on an 1860 concordat with the Holy See that are not offered to other religions such as state protection and monthly stipends for some priests; scholars have described Vodou as Haiti's "national religion"; theism is affirmed in the presidential and judicial oaths.

Protections: No explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2012 against discrimination specifically on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Haiti is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Haiti voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional and malregistration.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious or belief organisations are not mandated to register with the government in order to operate legally in Haiti. However, if groups do register, they will receive certain benefits including tax-exempt status, exemption from import duties on church-related items, protected class standing in legal disputes, and eligibility to receive public land to build schools. To obtain this status, a religious group must submit information on its leaders' qualifications, a membership directory, a list of the group's social projects, and annual activity reports to the Bureau of Worship (BOW). Completion of the separate clergy registration process also confers certain benefits, namely legal authority to conduct civil ceremonies, such as marriages and baptisms, following an oath-taking ceremony organised by the Ministry of Justice. To obtain registered clergy status, the individual sponsored by a registered religious entity must submit approximately 10 documents. The required documentation package includes proof of completion for both secondary school and university or seminary-level religious studies, as well as a police certificate confirming no criminal record and no outstanding warrants. Foreign missionaries operating in the country are subject to the same legal and administrative requirements as their domestic counterparts. The BOW said it continued to work with less established religious groups to facilitate their registrations while defending its rigorous registration process, although it said continuing insecurity presented serious challenges to reaching out to religious groups across the capital. As of December 31, the BOW reported that no new religious groups had registered during the year. BOW Director General Evans Souffrant said he believed there were no serious issues with religious discrimination in the country, and outreach to all faiths remained a priority for the BOW. According to the BOW, nationwide insecurity also remained a significant hindrance to its efforts to register religious leaders during the year. Sunni and Shia Muslim groups had not completed the procedures for registration and remained unregistered at year's end. According to the BOW, despite the benefits of registering, many religious groups and leaders continued to choose to remain unregistered to avoid government oversight. Religious minorities said they generally disagreed with this assessment or suggested it was an oversimplification. According to a Vodou leader, in contrast to its Catholic and Protestant counterparts, the decentralised Vodou community did not easily fit into the government's criteria for institutional registration, which emphasises a hierarchical leadership structure. Vodou leaders also said they believed this nonhierarchical structure made it more difficult for Vodouists to gain representation in other government bodies, such as the Provisional Electoral Council or the High Transition Council. Following the 2022 death of Euvonnie Georges Auguste, a manbo (female Vodou priest) who had led the National Confederation of Haitian Vodou for many years, Jackson Pierre Louis was appointed by confederation leadership early in the year as her interim replacement. According to 2021 BOW statistics, the most recent available, there were 9,195 certified Protestant pastors, 704 certified Catholic priests, and two certified Vodou clergy at the end of 2021, representing no change from 2020. By year's end, the government had not certified any Sunni, Shia, or Ahmadiyya Muslim imams.

Malregistration – while religious leaders representing the Catholic, Protestant, evangelical Christian, Muslim, Vodou, and Jewish communities continued to assert the government did not restrict their religious freedom, many religious leaders said the government's failure to maintain security and order hampered their communities' abilities to practice their religions freely. On April 7, local news site Vant Bef Info published an editorial condemning what it called government complicity in the continuing insecurity and economic downturn, which editors said prevented citizens from celebrating Easter traditions.

Recognition policy: a concordat between the government and the Holy See signed in 1860 formalises the relationship between the state and the Catholic Church and regulates the Catholic Church's structure within the state. The concordat accords the government some say in Catholic Church leadership, including providing the government the right of consent over the appointment of archbishops and bishops. The government has not exercised this right in recent years. The concordat also affords privileges to the Catholic Church, including state protection and financial support such as monthly stipends for some priests. The 1860 concordat between the government and the Holy See continued to be a major subject of debate among religious leaders during the year. A Catholic leader said the Catholic Church adhered to the concordat because it was legally bound to do so under the country's legal system, and it had a strong historical precedent. The president of the National Council of Haitian Muslims said he did not believe the concordat affected Muslims' freedom of religion. Several other non-Catholic religious leaders, however, raised concerns regarding the concordat. One Protestant leader said it was proof of "unequal treatment" between the Catholic Church and other faiths, which put other religious groups at a comparative disadvantage. Vodou leaders said it reflected longstanding government and societal preference for the Catholic Church over other religions, as well as a major piece of a longstanding history of discrimination and persecution against Vodouists.

Key restriction tools imposed: bilateral cooperation agreements are not made available to all religious and belief groups active in the country, informational requirements are excessive (the necessity for a religious leader to submit a religious studies diploma, a membership directory). Some Protestant religious leaders continued to advocate increased government regulation of religious groups, in particular, following a march led by Pastor Zidor in August to protest gang violence, during which gang members killed, tortured, or kidnapped dozens of parishioners. After the incident, citizens took to social media to condemn the "uneducated" and "irresponsible" nature of Zidor's actions as leader of his church and called on the government to investigate him and revoke his license. On August 29, authorities opened criminal proceedings against Zidor and closed his church.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system in the country that is dynamic enough to provide both existential recognition and legal registration to both traditional and non-traditional belief groups and at multiple levels of their activity; remove all instances of unstructure and the country should be able to be moved up to receptive status; to become Dynamic, the country would need to establish an independent recognition agency to manage with the recognition system and it would need to cater to both Christian and non-Christian groups simultaneously and equally.

Honduras, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Honduras is officially a secular state; however, privileges are granted to the Roman Catholic Church that are not offered to other religions; theism was also affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2013.

Protections: Implicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2013 against discrimination on the basis of religion. However, the law criminalises discrimination based on religion.

Human rights instruments: Honduras is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Honduras chose not to vote on the UDHR despite having the opportunity to.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Honduran law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government in order to conduct their operations legally in the country. However, if organisations do choose to register as legal entities, they will be classified under the religious designation ‘religious association.’ Organisations seeking status as a legal entity must apply to the Ministry of Governance, Justice, and Decentralization and provide information on their internal organisation, bylaws, and goals. Approved organizations must submit annual financial and activity reports to the government to remain registered. They may apply to the Ministry of Finance to receive benefits, such as tax exemptions and customs duty waivers. Unregistered religious organizations do not receive tax-exempt status. The official nongovernmental and religious organisation registry office – the Directorate of Regulation, Registration, and Monitoring of Civil Associations (DIRRSAC) – is located within the Ministry of Governance, Justice, and Decentralization. The government requires foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits and mandates that a local institution or individual must sponsor a missionary’s application for residency and submit it to immigration authorities. The government has agreements with the Evangelical Fellowship of Missionaries and Ministries of Honduras, Church of Jesus Christ, and Seventh-day Adventists, among others, to facilitate entry and residence permits for their missionaries. Groups with which the government does not have a written agreement are required to provide proof of employment and income for their missionaries. Foreign religious workers may request residency for up to five years. To renew their residence permits, religious workers must submit proof of continued employment with the sponsoring religious group at least 30 days before their residency expires. According to immigration law, individuals who “fraudulently exercise their religious profession or office or commit fraud against the health or religious beliefs of citizens of the country, or the national patrimony” may be fined or face other legal consequences. The criminal code protects clergy authorised to operate in the country from being required by a court or the attorney general’s office to testify regarding privileged information obtained in confidence during a religious confession. The law does not require vicars, bishops, and archbishops of the Catholic Church and comparably ranked individuals from other legally recognised religious groups to appear in court if subpoenaed. They are required, however, to make a statement at a location of their choosing. The official regulations for the penal system state that penitentiaries must guarantee the free exercise of religion without preference for one specific religion, so long as the worship is not against the law or public order. Prisoners have access to religious counselling from leaders of their faith. While the government authorises clergy from all religious groups to conduct marriage ceremonies, by law it recognises only civil marriages conducted by the municipal mayor or notary public who are authorised to perform marriage ceremonies. The official work week is Monday to Saturday, with no exceptions for religious groups that celebrate Friday or Saturday as their Sabbath. During the year, the DIRRSAC registered 103 religious associations, mostly evangelical Protestant churches, compared with 54 associations registered in 2022. Among those registered were Iglesia de Cristo Bethel in El Progreso, Yoro; Ministerio Internacional el Israel de Dios in San Pedro Sula; and Iglesia Central de Adoracion Casa del Espiritu Santo in Tocoa, Colon. Some Seventh-day Adventist workers employed by both public and private companies in El Progreso and Yoro said they faced pressure to work during their Sabbath.

Key restriction tools imposed: bilateral cooperation agreements are not made accessible to all religious groups.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish provisions for existential recognition in addition to the already existent procedures for legal registration; ensure that these provisions are bestowed universally and equally across traditional and non-traditional belief systems as well as to NRMs, and at multiple levels of activity; remove any remaining minor restrictive policies within the recognition system; to become Dynamic, the Honduran government would need to allow for the establishment of a recognition agency to manage its recognition system and its activities independent of government involvement in order to ensure that freedom of religion or belief maintains its status of being ectopolitical.



Iceland

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland (ELC) is the state denomination of Iceland.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2013 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Iceland is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Iceland voted in favour of the UDHR; Iceland is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.



Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Icelandic law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government in order to be able to legally operate in the country. The ELC is considered already registered and so automatically receives all privileges granted to registered organisations in addition to exclusive privileges as the state church. Only registered groups are eligible for state funding and entitled to legal recognition of religious ceremonies, such as marriages, that they perform. Groups apply for recognition to the district commissioner's office that covers the administration of religion on a national level (currently the District Commissioner's Office of Northeast Iceland), which forwards the application to a four-member panel appointed by the Minister of Justice to review applications. The University of Iceland faculty of law nominates the panel's chair, and the university's Departments of Social and Human Sciences, Theology and Religious Studies, and History and Philosophy, respectively, nominate the other three members. The district commissioner then approves or rejects the application in accordance with the panel's decision. Applicants may appeal rejections to the Ministry of Justice, resubmitting their application to the district commissioner with additional information. The same four-member panel reviews appeals. To qualify for registration, a religious group must "practice a creed or religion," and a life-stance organisation must operate in accordance with certain ethical values and "deal with ethics or epistemology in a prescribed manner." The law does not define "certain ethical values" or the prescribed manner in which groups must deal with ethics or epistemology. Religious groups and life-stance organizations must also "be well established," "be active and stable," "not have a purpose that violates the law or is prejudicial to good morals or public order," and have "a core group of members who participate in its operations, support the values of the organization in compliance with the teachings it was founded on, and pay church taxes in accordance with the law on church taxes." The law does not define "well established" or "active and stable." According to the District Commissioner's Office of Northeast Iceland, any unregistered religious group or organization may work in the same way as any company or association, provided it has, as the other organisations do, a social security number. Unregistered religious groups may, for example, open bank accounts and own real estate. Members are free to worship and practice their beliefs without restriction as long as their activities do not cause a public disturbance, incite discrimination, or otherwise conflict with the law. The law specifies the leader of a registered religious group or life-stance organisation must be at least 25 years of age and fulfil the general requirements for holding a public position. These include being physically and mentally healthy and financially independent, not having been sentenced for a criminal offense as a civil servant, and possessing the general and specialised education legally required for the position. Unlike the requirements for most public positions, a religious or life-stance group leader need not be a citizen but must have legal domicile in the country. All registered religious groups and life-stance organizations must submit an annual report to the relevant district commissioner's office (currently the District Commissioner's Office of Northeast Iceland), describing the group's operations during the previous year. Registered religious groups and life-stance organisations are required to perform state-sanctioned functions, such as marriages and the official naming of children, and preside over other ceremonies, such as funerals. The law provides state subsidies to registered religious groups and life-stance organisations. For each individual 16 years of age or older who belongs to any of the officially registered and recognized religious groups or life-stance organisations, the government allocates an annual payment from income taxes, called the "church tax," to the individual's respective registered organisation. The per capita payment amount varies each year according to the annual budget bill. The government allocates the payment regardless of whether the individual pays any income tax. Registers Iceland, the government office that maintains records of basic information on everyone who is or has been domiciled in the country, as well as citizens residing abroad, maintains a tally of the number of members of each registered group, records the religious affiliation or non-affiliation of each citizen at birth, and adjusts the information if individuals report a change. Persons who are not members of a registered organization are still required to pay the church tax, but the government retains their contributions as general revenue rather than allocating them to religious or life-stance organisations. By law, a child's affiliation or nonaffiliation with a registered religious or life-stance group is determined as follows: (1) if the parents are married or in registered cohabitation and both belong to either the same registered organization or no organisation, then the child's affiliation shall be the same as its parents; (2) if the parents are married or in registered cohabitation, but have different affiliations or if one parent is nonaffiliated, then the parents shall make a joint decision on which organization, if any, the child should be affiliated with, and until the parents make this decision, the child shall remain nonaffiliated; and (3) if the parents are not married or in registered cohabitation when the child is born, the child shall be affiliated with the same registered organization, if any, as the parent who has custody over the child. A change in affiliation of children younger than 16 requires the consent of both parents if both have custody; if only one parent has custody, the consent of the noncustodial parent is not required. The law requires parents to consult their children regarding any changes in the child's affiliation between ages 12 through 15. After turning 16, children may choose affiliation on their own. The government registered the life-stance organization The Theosophical Society during the year. As of year's end, the Greek Orthodox Church's application, submitted in 2022, and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, submitted in 2023 remained under government consideration. Sidmennt continued to criticise authorities for developing policy on religious matters without consulting minority religious groups or life stance organizations. Sidmennt continued to describe the government's policy as principally focused on creating a legal framework for the ELC, while other religious groups were afterthoughts. The government reported the 2022 government church tax payment to registered religious and life-stance groups was 13,284 kronur (\$98) for each member aged 16 or older, compared with 12,960 kronur (\$95) in 2021.

Key restriction tools imposed: maturity quota and public position requirements, non-recognition for any denomination or religion other than the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland (ELC), stipulated qualifications are ambiguous and lend to state definitions of religion or belief, successful registration in Iceland is dependent upon approval by a panel of scholars effecting hinging registration on the opinions of a four-member panel (an example of religious consultation restriction tool), vertical recognition system due to the state privilege bestowed to the ELC which possesses legal benefits (verticalism).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition agency that is independent of the government in its actions and activities; this would secure Iceland's classification as Dynamic; establish provisions for existential recognition; state religion can remain although no special privileges should be provided to the ELC if these same benefits are not also extended to all other groups.

India, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: **Censorious**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: India is officially a secular state; however, state privilege is granted to Hinduism; official minority status is granted in law to Buddhists, Christians, Jains, Muslims, Parsis and Sikhs; theism is affirmed in the presidential oath.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2016 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: India is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; India voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory.**

Registration policy: conditional mandatory registration – although the government does not mandate that all religious groups register with it, it does state that religious groups receiving any kind of foreign funding must register in accordance with the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA). The FCRA requires religious groups and other NGOs that receive foreign funding to be licensed by the Ministry of Home Affairs before accepting or transferring foreign funds. This license must be renewed every five years. Federal law further requires NGOs that are registered under the law, including religious organizations, to maintain audit reports for their accounts and a schedule of their activities and to provide these to state government officials upon request. The central government may reject a license application or a request to transfer funds if it judges the recipient to be acting against “harmony between religious, racial, social, linguistic, or regional groups, castes, or communities.” The FCRA requires that NGOs, including religious organisations, use no more than 20 percent of their funding for administrative purposes and are prohibited from transferring foreign funds to any other organisation or individual, limitations that many NGOs stated they found challenging to maintain their operations.

Recognition policy: the constitution states any legal reference to Hindus is to be construed to include followers of Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism, meaning they are subject to laws regarding Hindus, such as the Hindu Marriage Act. Subsequent legislation continues to use the word Hindu as a category that includes Sikhs, Buddhists, Baha'is, and Jains, but it identifies the groups as separate religions whose followers are included under the law. Federal law provides official minority status to six religious groups: Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, Jains, and Buddhists. State governments may grant minority status under state law to religious groups that are minorities in a particular region. Members of recognized minority groups are eligible for government assistance programs. The constitution states that the government is responsible for protecting minorities and enabling them to preserve their culture. The law recognises the registration of Sikh marriages but does not include divorce provisions for Sikhs. Divorce and other Sikh personal status matters fall under Hindu codes. Under the law, any person, irrespective of religion, may seek a divorce in civil court.

Key restriction tools imposed: broad grounds for the denial of registration leave this mechanism open to misuse against groups unfavoured by the state, misrecognition of Buddhists, Baha'is, Jains and Sikhs as Hindus or followers of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism as part of Hinduism and thereby subject to Hindu laws, monitorial requirements on an annual basis is permissible but not "on request" of the state government, restrictions were recently imposed on what NGOs (including religious groups) can claim as funds for administrative purposes, vertical recognition system is created with the "minority-community status" (verticalism). Under the laws of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, authorities may prohibit proselytizing near any place of worship. Punishment for violations may include imprisonment for up to three years and fines of up to 5,000 rupees (\$60). The laws in those states also ban the propagation or practice of any non-Hindu religion in localities designated as “temple towns” because of the number of significant Hindu temples located in those areas. Karnataka's anticonversion law allows for imprisonment of three to five years and a fine of up to 25,000 rupees (\$300) in the case of proselytizing persons from general categories and imprisonment of three to 10 years and a fine of up to 50,000 rupees (\$600) for forcibly converting children, women and persons from the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted in 10 of the 28 states); **hierocny** (free); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (free); **pastoral services** (free); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration if donations originate from overseas); **religious buildings** (free); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (free); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Establish provisions for existential recognition and reverse issues with misrecognition; dismantle all forms of vertical recognition; remove all restrictive policies on conversion and proselytism; broad grounds for the denial of registration to be misuse against groups unfavoured by the state need to be applied responsibly.



सत्यमेव जयते

Indonesia, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Indonesia is a secular state; however, Sunni Islam receives exclusive privileges; Pancasila is Indonesia's official state ideology which affirms the precepts of monotheism, a just and civilised society, national unity, democracy and social justice; Buddhism, Catholicism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam and Protestantism are recognised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA); theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2002.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2016 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Indonesia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Indonesia did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory and malregistration.

Registration policy: discriminatory-mandatory registration – Indonesian law mandates that all religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally in the country except organisations the government deems profess one of the six recognised religions in which case they are not mandated to register. Organisations belonging to unrecognised religions are required to obtain a legal charter and approval from the Ministry of Law and Human Rights (MLHR) as well as a legal charter as a civil society organisation (CSO) from MOHA. Both MOHA and MLHR consult with MORA before granting legal status to religious organisations. The law requires all CSOs to uphold the national ideology of Pancasila, which encompasses the principles of belief in one God, justice, unity, democracy, and social justice. MORA's approval is announced publicly through a state publication. Violations of the law may result in a loss of legal status, dissolution of the organisation, and arrest of members under the blasphemous articles of the criminal code or other applicable laws. Indigenous religious groups must register with the Ministry of Education and Culture as aliran kepercayaan to obtain official, legal status. The law requires the leader of an aliran kepercayaan group to demonstrate group members live in at least three regencies, which are administrative designations one level below a province, before the leader may officiate at a wedding. This constraint effectively bars members of some smaller groups without such geographic presence from having their marriage ceremony officiated by a member of their faith, although groups may aid each other and facilitate marriage ceremonies by an officiant from a group with similar faith traditions and rituals. The government requires all officially registered religious groups to comply with directives from MORA and other ministries on issues such as the construction of houses of worship, receipt of foreign aid by domestic religious institutions, and propagation of religion. A 2006 joint ministerial decree issued by MORA and MOHA states that religious groups may not hold services in private residences, and those seeking to build a house of worship must obtain the signatures of at least 90 members of the group and 60 persons of other religious groups in the community stating they support the construction. Local governments are responsible for implementing the decree. The decree also requires approval from the local interfaith council, called the religious harmony forum (FKUB), before construction can proceed. Government-established FKUBs exist at the provincial and district/city level and are comprised of religious leaders from the six official groups. They are responsible for mediating inter-religious conflicts. A joint ministerial decree by MORA and MOHA requires domestic religious organizations to obtain approval from MORA to receive funding from overseas donors. The decree also prohibits dissemination of religious literature and pamphlets to members of other religious groups as well as all forms of proselytising, including door-to-door proselytising. Foreign religious workers must obtain religious worker visas, and foreign religious organisations must obtain permission from MORA to provide any type of assistance (in-kind, personnel, or financial) to local religious groups.

Malregistration – the ongoing Papua conflict means that the central government may not have the ability to enforce registration laws at it prescribes in all its territory.

Recognition policy: MORA extends state recognition and support to groups in six religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. The government defines a religion as having a prophet, holy book, and deity as well as international recognition. The government deems the six officially recognized religions to meet these requirements. The Indonesian Council of Ulemas (MUI) is a quasi-governmental organization of Muslim clerics whose stated responsibility is maintaining religious harmony and supporting national development. While the constitution does not cite any specific branch of Islam as official, MUI comprises only Sunni Muslim groups, including Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. MUI does not accept Shia or Ahmadiyya members. The laws on blasphemy and "deviant interpretations" only protect the defamation of the six officially recognised religions.

Key restriction tools imposed: deregistration can lead to arrest of group members, imposition of state definitions of religion, qualifications for registered status impose the state ideology of Pancasila and are also ambiguous which lends to their misuse against groups unfavoured by the state, religious consultation restriction tool is imposed by the fact that the Ministry of Religious Affairs must approve registration despite the fact that the Ministry of Home Affairs deals with registration procedures and the dispensation of legal charters, signature quota for places of worship; a 2008 joint ministerial decree by MORA, MOHA, and AGO bans both proselytizing by the Ahmadi Muslim community and vigilantism against the group. Violations of the ban on proselytizing by Ahmadis carry a maximum five-year prison sentence on charges of blasphemy. According to the criminal code, vigilantism carries a maximum four-and-one-half-year prison sentence. If persons proactively ask for information from Ahmadi Muslims about their faith, Ahmadis are permitted to speak freely about their beliefs without violating the ban on proselytizing; Another joint ministerial decree by MORA, MOHA, and AGO bans the Fajar Nusantara Movement, known as Gafatar, from proselytizing, spreading its teachings publicly, or conducting any other activities deemed to spread deviant interpretations of Islam. Violators of the ban may be charged with blasphemy and may receive a maximum five-year prison sentence; the MUI has issued fatwas that ban proselytizing by what it calls deviant groups, such as Inkar al-Sunnah, Ahmadiyya, Islam Jama'ah, the Lia Eden Community, and al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah. The MUI has issued fatwas and guidance cautioning against the spread of Shia teachings, including a 2013 guidebook called "Recognizing and Being Aware of Shia Deviations." Across the country, minority religious groups, including Muslim groups in non-Muslim majority areas, continued to say the official requirement that groups had to obtain signatures from 90 members of the religious community and 60 members of other religious communities in the area supporting the construction or renovation of a house of worship was a barrier. NGOs continued to report that some local governments did not issue permits for the construction of new places of worship, even when congregations had the required number of members, because those who opposed the construction for religious reasons sometimes pressured neighbors not to support the construction. NGOs continued to report cases in which a few vocal opponents were reportedly successful in persuading officials to stop issuing construction permits, effectively giving groups from majority religions a de facto veto over construction of houses of worship by minority faith groups. Some NGOs also advocated removing the requirement of FKUB approval, describing it as an unnecessary bureaucratic step that was sometimes used to deny approval of houses of worship that otherwise meet legal requirements. Obtaining a building permit remained an obstacle for some religious groups. Local authorities typically prohibited services from taking place in buildings that had not received official approval. In situations where congregations had obtained a building permit, local authorities sometimes defended the congregation's right to construct a house of worship when faced with local opposition. Although the government generally allowed citizens to leave the religion column blank on their identity card (KTP) applications and a 2017 Constitutional Court ruling allowed citizens to select indigenous faiths on their KTP applications, individuals continued to report difficulties accessing government services if they chose either option. Faced with this problem, many religious minority members, including those following indigenous beliefs and atheists, reportedly chose to identify as a member of an officially recognized religion close to their beliefs or of the locally dominant religion. According to researchers, this practice obscured the real numbers of adherents to religious groups in government statistics. NGOs and religious advocacy groups continued to urge the government to remove the religion field from KTPs.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); hierarchy (not free; restricted and any materials considered anti-Muslim prohibited); monasticism (not free; subject to registration); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; subject to registration); public expression and observance (not free; restricted); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration if donations originate from overseas); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (not free; subject to registration); religious literature (not free; subject to registration); religious and worship services (not free; subject to registration); religious trade (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Dismantle the misused recognition system and replace with one that is inclusive of all belief systems, both traditional and NRMs; halt government involvement in the internal affairs of religious organisations; revoke all policies that seek to restrict religious activity or the broader registration process.



Iran, Islamic Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: **Terminal**

FoRB Claim: **Partial claim is made.**

Secularity: Twelver Ja'afari Shia Islam is the state denomination of Iran; Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians were declared recognised religious minorities in the latest revised constitution from 1989; the latest revised constitution also stated that the four Sunni schools of thought and the Shia Zaydi school are “deserving of total respect”; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution.

Protections: No protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 1989 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Iran is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Iran voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatory of registration: mandatory and non-registration.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration and non-registration – the Iranian government mandates that all citizens associated with one of the three recognised religious minorities register with the authorities. Authorities may close a church and arrest its leaders if churchgoers do not register or if unregistered individuals attend services. Other than this, there are no provisions for the registration of any other religious or belief organisations in Iran. It is illegal to register an explicitly Humanist, atheist, secularist or other nonreligious NGO or other human rights organisation, or such groups are persecuted by authorities.”

Recognition policy: the constitution states Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only recognised religious minorities. “Within the limits of the law,” they have permission to perform religious rites and ceremonies and to form religious societies. They are also free to address personal affairs and religious education according to their own religious canon. The government considers any citizen who is not a registered member of one of these three groups or who cannot prove his or her family was Christian prior to 1979 to be Muslim. Citizens who are not recognised as Christians, Zoroastrians, or Jews generally may not engage in public expression of religious faith, such as worshipping in a church or wearing religious symbols such as a cross. The government makes some exceptions for foreigners belonging to unrecognised religious groups.

Key restriction tools imposed: conversion to Christianity is not recognised in law (including non-registration and denial of rights granted to those born as Christians), mandatory self-registration if one is a member of one of the “recognised religious minorities”, misrecognition of the Sabean-Mandaean community as Christians and Yarsanis as Shia Muslims, pseudo-recognition of “recognised religious minorities”, unregistration will result in the forced closure of the religious building and the arrest of leaders if either members do not register or unregistered members attend services, vertical recognition system (verticalism), Muslim by default. By law, non-Muslims may not engage in public persuasion or attempt to convert a Muslim to another faith or belief. The law considers these activities to be proselytizing and punishable by two to five years’ imprisonment, or up to 10 years if the individual received financial or organisational help from outside the country. The last execution of a non-Muslim specifically for proselytising occurred in 1998. The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security monitor religious activity. The IRGC, an independent, stand-alone branch of the armed services charged with protecting the integrity of the Islamic Republic and reporting directly to the supreme leader, also monitors churches. According to human rights organizations, Christian advocacy groups, and NGOs, the government continued to regulate Christian religious practices. Official reports and media continued to characterise private Christian churches in homes as “illegal networks” and “Zionist propaganda institutions.” Authorities also reportedly barred unregistered or unrecognized Christians from entering church premises and closed churches that allowed them to enter. In response, many Christian converts practiced in secret. Other unrecognized religious minorities, such as Baha'is and Yarsanis, were also forced to assemble in private homes to practice their faith in secret. The state-issued national identity card, required for almost all government and other transactions, allowed citizens to register as belonging to one of the country’s recognised religions or leave the religious affiliation blank. According to the Atlantic Council, religious minorities or atheists needed to lie to receive a national identification card or face denial of access to services, such as insurance, education, banking, and public transportation.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; illegal to convert from Islam); **hieronymy** (not free; non-Shia materials prohibited); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **proselytism** (not free; illegal for non-Muslims); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted and illegal in some forms); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the present system established by the regime must first occur before any further recommendations can be made; reinstatement of the penal code to reflect principles of international human rights on matters of FoRB; abolish the vertical elements of the recognition system, pseudo-recognition of religious minorities, and misrecognition of unrecognised groups.

Iraq, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: **Terminal**

ForRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Islam is the state religion of Iraq; the latest constitution from 2005 protects the “Islamic identity” of the Iraqi people but makes no specific mention of Sunni or Shia Islam; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2005; the religious rights of Christians, Yazidis and Mandaean Sabaeans were specifically mentioned in the same constitution from 2005.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 2005 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Iraq is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Iraq voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **non-registration and malregistration.**



Registration policy: non-registration – outside Iraqi Kurdistan, there is no mechanism for new religious or belief organisations or organisations affiliated with a religion not already recognised to receive legal status through registering. Three diwans (offices) are responsible for administering matters for the recognized religious groups at the national level within the country: the Sunni Endowment Diwan, the Shia Endowment Diwan, and the Christian and Minorities Endowment Diwan. The three diwans operate under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office to disburse government funds to maintain and protect religious facilities through the endowments of their respective communities.

Stipulatory registration – within Iraqi Kurdistan, religious groups can register with the Kurdistan Regional Government's Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs (KRG MERA). In the IKR, religious groups obtain recognition by registering with the KRG MERA. To register, a group must have a minimum of 150 adherents, provide documentation on the sources of its financial support, and demonstrate it is not “anti-Islam.” Eight faiths are recognized and registered with the KRG MERA: Islam, Christianity, Yazidism, Judaism, Sabean-Mandaism, Zoroastrianism, Yarsanism, and the Baha'i Faith. According to the KRG MERA, individuals from 14 different Christian government-recognized denominations reside in the IKR, including denominations associated with the Chaldean Church, Assyrian Old Eastern Church, Syriac Orthodox Church, Syriac Catholic Church, Armenian Orthodox Church, Greek Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church, Assyrian Protestant Church, Coptic Orthodox Church, and Seventh-day Adventist Church. The KRG MERA administers endowments that pay salaries of clergy and fund construction and maintenance of religious sites for Muslims, Christians, and Yazidis, but not for the other five registered religions.

Malregistration – the ongoing ISIS insurgency means that the government may not have the ability to enforce its registration laws throughout the country.

Recognition policy: the personal status law recognises the following religious groups as registered with the government: Muslims, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Assyrian Catholics, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholics, Armenian Apostolic, Armenian Catholics, Roman Catholics, National Protestants, Anglicans, Evangelical Protestant Assyrians, Seventh-day Adventists, Coptic Orthodox, Yazidis, Sabean-Mandaeans, and Jews. Recognition allows groups to appoint legal representatives and perform legal transactions, such as buying and selling property. All recognized religious groups in the country, except for Yazidis, have their own personal-status courts responsible for handling marriage, divorce, and inheritance issues. The law does not permit some religious groups, including Baha'i, Zoroastrian, and Kaka'i, to register under their professed religions, which, although the groups are recognised in the IKR, remain unrecognized under federal law and lack legal protections provided to the recognized religions. Federal law criminalises the practice of the Baha'i Faith. Although not recognized by the federal government, practicing Wahhabi Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Yarsanism are not criminalised. Contracts signed by institutions of these unrecognized religious groups are not considered legal or admissible as evidence in court.

National identity cards – national identity cards issued after 2016 do not denote the bearer's religion, although the online application still requests this information, and a data chip on the card still contains data on religion. The only religions that may be listed on the national identity card application are Christian, Sabean-Mandaean, Yazidi, Jewish, and Muslim. There is neither a distinction between Shia and Sunni Muslims, nor a designation of specific Christian denominations. Individuals practicing other faiths may only receive identity cards if they self-identify as Muslim, Yazidi, Sabean-Mandaean, Jewish, or Christian. Without an official identity card, one may not register a marriage, enrol children in public school, acquire passports, or obtain some government services. Passports do not specify religion. Zoroastrian, Kaka'i, and Baha'i Faith adherents again reported their religion was listed as “Islam” on their federal identification cards, a continuing problem reported by members of unrecognized religious groups due to the country's constitution and personal status law.

Key restriction tools imposed: pseudo-recognition is extended to Christians and other minorities in that although they are recognised under personal status law they still cannot practice freely and certainly not to the full extent as prescribed in ForRB, vertical recognition system (verticalism); Iraqi Kurdistan has its own registration procedures and imposes both a membership quota onto registrant religious groups and value informational requirements such as presenting documentation showing the group is not “anti-Islam”, eight religious communities receive pseudo-recognition, prohibition of the Baha'i Faith by Iraqi federal law with a penalty of 10 years in prison for anyone convicted of practicing it, although the law is not enforced as a matter of informal policy. The KRG also does not enforce the federal ban as a matter of practice and policy, and the KRG recognises the Baha'i Faith as a religion.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; illegal for a Muslim to convert to another religion); **hierarcy** (not free; restricted and any materials considered offensive to Muslim culture prohibited); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (not free; restricted, especially for practitioners of the Baha'i Faith due to it being a prohibited religion); **proselytism** (not free; illegal); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the abuse of recognition is essential to making any further headway to attaining genuine religious freedom in Iraq; this means halting the persecution of minorities, establishing a recognition system that has provisions for both existential recognition and legal registration and the disestablishment of Islam.

Ireland



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Ireland is a secular state (the Church of Ireland, an Anglican church, was disestablished in 1871); however, exclusive privileges are granted to the Roman Catholic Church, especially in the area of schooling; theism, specifically Christian trinitarianism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2019; the President, all judges and members of the Council of State are required to swear a religious oath that begins with a reference to “Almighty God.”

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 2019 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Ireland is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Ireland did not vote on the UDHR; Ireland is party to the ECHR.

Mandatory of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Irish law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally in the country, neither does the law set out any formal procedures for the registration of a religious or belief organisation. Religious groups may apply to the Office of the Revenue Commissioners (the tax authority) as a charity to receive tax exemptions, and the groups must operate exclusively for charitable purposes, which under the law may include “the advancement of religion.” The law requires all charitable organizations carrying out activities in the country to register with and provide certain information relating to their organization to the Charities Regulator, a government-appointed independent authority. The regulator maintains a public register of charitable organizations and ensures their compliance with the law. Organizations must apply their income and property solely toward the promotion of their main charitable object, as set out in their governing instruments (such as a constitution, memorandum and articles of association, deed of trust, or rules). There is no category for the advancement of nonreligious philosophical beliefs.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, qualification that a religious group must provide "public benefit" are vulnerable to misuse against unfavoured groups.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that can provide both existential recognition and legal registration simultaneously and at different levels of activity; to become Dynamic, established a recognition agency that is independent of government to manage the newly established recognition system.

Israel, State of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Partial claim is made.



Secularity: Israel is officially a secular state; Judaism is given a special position in the legal and political framework; several laws refer to Israel as a “Jewish and democratic state”; Israel law recognises only the Baha'i Faith, Christianity, Druze religion, Islam and Judaism.

Protections: No explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2013 against discrimination specifically on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Israel is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Israel is not partied to the UNDRIP; Israel did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – the Israeli government does not mandate that religious groups register with it in order to operate legally in the country. The language of the legislation amalgamates recognition with legal registration, leaving no distinct procedures for registration.

Recognition policy: under the Law of Return, the Population and Immigration Authority of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) recognises Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform conversions in the country for the purpose of immigration, citizenship, and registration. Those who convert through a non-Orthodox denomination, whether inside or outside the country, are not able to obtain religious services such as marriage, divorce, or burial in a Jewish cemetery. The law recognises only Judaism, Christianity, Islam, the Baha'i Faith, and the Druze religion. The adopted Ottoman millet (court) system recognises Christian religious communities, including Eastern Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), Gregorian-Armenian, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Catholic, Chaldean (Chaldean Uniate Catholic), Greek Catholic Melkite, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, and Evangelical Episcopal. By law, the Anglican and Baha'i communities are recognized by the government. The government does not recognize other religious communities, including major Protestant denominations in the country, as distinct religious communities. The two legal pathways to formal recognition include petitioning either the Prime Minister's Office or the MOI. Groups may appeal rejected applications to the Supreme Court. Recognised religious communities are exempt from taxation of their places of worship and may have separate courts to apply their religion's personal status laws. Municipalities may levy property taxes on religious properties not used for prayer, such as schools, monasteries, pilgrim hostels, and soup kitchens. The law establishes local religious councils for Jewish communities and for the Druze. The MRS has jurisdiction over the country's Jewish religious councils that oversee the provision of religious services for Jewish communities. The government finances approximately 40 percent of the religious councils' budgets, and local municipalities fund the remainder. The MOI Department of Non-Jewish Affairs has jurisdiction over religious matters concerning non-Jewish groups and oversees the religious council for the Druze. The Department of Non-Jewish Affairs convenes an annual inter-religious council of all recognised religions, including Judaism, which serves as a discussion forum for recognised religious communities. Members of some unrecognized groups may process their personal status documents, including marriage licenses, only through the authorities of one of the recognized religious communities, if those authorities agree. Membership in a recognized religion is recorded in the National Registry and generally passed from parent to child unless a person changes it through a formal conversion to another recognized religion. Religious identification is listed in the National Registry but not on official identity cards.

Key restriction tools imposed: non-recognition for Protestant groups and other minorities, secondary procedures are imposed as part of the registration process, vertical recognition is in place due to different religions and their communities being recognised under different laws from both the modern Israeli law to the Ottoman millet to the British Mandate era (verticalism). It is illegal to proselytise to a person younger than 18 without the consent of both parents. The law prohibits offering a material benefit to potential converts while proselytising.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; individuals may only legally convert to one of the recognised religions); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (free); **pastoral services** (free); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (free); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (free); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that has sufficient provisions for both existential recognition and legal registration simultaneously and at different levels of activity; remove existent abuses of the recognition system that have amounted to stagnation of recognition processes and overall caused violations of citizens' religious freedoms.

Italian Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Italy is officially a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1985); however, exclusive privileges are granted to the Roman Catholic Church; the latest revised constitution from 2020 described both the state and the Catholic Church as “independent and sovereign, each with its own sphere.”

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2020 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Italy is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Italy did not vote on the UDHR; Italy is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Italian law does not formally mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally in the country, clergy from unregistered organisations are not legally permitted to provide pastoral care to members in prisons and hospitals which makes registration pseudo-mandatory. The law provides religious groups with tax-exempt status and the right to recognition as legal entities once they have completed the registration process with the Ministry of Interior (MOI). Legal registration is a prerequisite for any group seeking an accord with the government. A religious group may apply for registration by submitting an official request to a prefect (the local MOI representative) that includes the group’s statutes, a report on its goals and activities, information on its administrative offices, a three-year budget, certification of its credit status by a bank, and certification of the Italian citizenship or legal residency of its head. To be approved, a group’s statutes must not conflict with the law. Once approved, the group must submit to MOI administrative monitoring, including oversight of its budget and internal organization. The MOI may appoint a commissioner to administer the group if it identifies irregularities in its activities. Religious groups that are not registered may still operate legally as cultural associations and obtain tax-exempt status, legal recognition of marriages, access to hospitals and prisons, and other benefits, but those benefits are more easily obtained if a group has an accord with the government. The Catholic Church is the only legally recognized group exempted from MOI monitoring, in accordance with the concordat between the government and the Holy See. An accord also allows a religious group to receive funds collected by the state through a voluntary 0.8 percent of personal income tax set-aside on taxpayer returns. Taxpayers may specify to which eligible religious group they would like to direct these funds. National law does not restrict religious face coverings, but some local authorities impose restrictions. Regional laws in Liguria, Veneto, and Lombardy prohibit the wearing of burqas and niqabs in public buildings and institutions, including hospitals. All missionaries and other foreign religious workers from countries that are not EU members or signatories of the Schengen Agreement must apply with the MOI for special religious activity visas before arriving in the country. An applicant must attach an invitation letter from his or her religious group to the application. Eligible applicants are those who have already received priestly ordination, or equivalent status, as well as religious ministers belonging to denominational organisations already registered with the MOI, and who intend to participate in religious ceremonies or events or ecclesiastical, religious, or pastoral activities. Visa duration varies based on the request of the religious organisation.

Recognition policy: relations between the state and the Catholic Church are governed by a concordat between the government and the Holy See. Representatives of a non-Catholic faith requesting an accord must first submit their request to the Prime Minister’s Office. The government and the group’s representatives then negotiate a draft agreement, which the Council of Ministers must approve. The Prime Minister then signs and submits the agreement to parliament for final approval. Thirteen groups have an accord: the Confederation of Methodist and Waldensian Churches, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, Jews, Baptists, Lutherans, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Orthodox Church of the Constantinople Patriarchate, the Italian Apostolic Church, the Buddhist Union, Soka Gakkai Buddhists, Hindus, and the Anglican Church. According to leaders of the Islamic Cultural Center of Italy, the government again did not make significant progress on reaching an accord with the Muslim community, despite continuing dialogue with various Islamic religious entities. The MOI continued to recognize only the Islamic Cultural Center of Italy, which administers the Great Mosque of Rome, as a legal religious entity, a prerequisite to signing an accord, but by year’s end, it had not signed one. The government recognized other Islamic groups as nonprofit organisations. National leaders of the larger Islamic organisations said an apparent effect of the lack of a formal agreement between the government and any Muslim group is a proportionally small number of formally recognised mosques, representing a challenge for locating adequate worship spaces for the country’s more than 2.3 million Muslims. They said a lack of a national central body representing a majority of the country’s Muslims could also be a factor. Regional governments and Muslim religious authorities continued to recognize eight mosques, respectively, in Colle Val d’Elsa, Albenga, Milan, Rome, Ravenna, Forlì, Palermo and Catania. In addition, local governments continued to recognize many other sites as Islamic places of worship, although some Muslim authorities said these were not full-fledged mosques because they lacked minarets or other key architectural features such as domes.

Key restriction tools imposed: informational requirements requested are excessive (namely mandating that the group’s head must be an Italian national or have achieved local residency as well as credit status certification from a bank), it must be assured that bilateral cooperation agreements are made available to all religious groups, vertical recognition system is in place due to the state privilege extended to the Catholic Church.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition agency to manage religious recognition independent of government; revoke excessive informational requirements.



Jamaica

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Jamaica is a secular state; however, theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2011 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Jamaica is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Jamaica did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – religious or belief organisations are not formally required by law to register with the government to operate legally in Jamaica. However, for clergy to be legally permitted to enter prisons to provide pastoral care, they must be part of a registered religious organisations which in effect makes registration pseudo-mandatory. Other benefits of registration include the ability to hold land and to enter into legal disputes as organisations. The process of registration is referred to as ‘incorporation.’ Groups seeking incorporated status are required to apply to the Companies Office of Jamaica (Companies Office), an executive agency. The application comprises a standard form and a fee of 24,500 Jamaican dollars (\$160). Nongovernmental organizations register through the same form and fee structure. Groups incorporated through this process must subsequently submit annual reports and financial statements to the Companies Office. Alternatively, religious groups may petition parliament to be incorporated by parliamentary act. Such groups receive similar benefits to those incorporating through the Companies Office, but parliament does not require annual reports or regulate the organisations it incorporates. Regardless of incorporation status, religious groups seeking tax-exempt status must register as charities. To be considered a charity, an organization must apply either to the Department of Co-operatives and Friendly Societies, within the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce, or to the Companies Office of Jamaica. Once registered, groups also submit their registration to the Jamaica Customs Agency within the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service and apply to Tax Administration Jamaica to be considered for tax-free status. Foreign religious workers, regardless of affiliation, who visit the country to work with a religious organisation, must obtain a visa and a work permit from the Ministry of Labor and Social Security.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, parliamentary acts are provided as an alternative procedure for registration and although benefits received as the same as the groups having undergone the main registration procedure the monitorial requirements are less stringent (parliamentarianism), registration fee of \$1,600 significantly exceeds the RoRB standards threshold of \$100, vertical registration system based on the fact that some groups are less monitored than others; a colonial-era law criminalising Obeah and Myalism remains in effect. Potential punishment for practicing Obeah and Myalism includes imprisonment of up to 12 months. The government, however, did not in practice enforce this law. Seventh-day Adventists continued to report that their observance of the Sabbath on Saturdays caused them difficulties, for example by facing challenges with employment due to their inability to work on Saturday. The Jamaica Defense Force (JDF) generally continued to refuse acceptance of Rastafarians into its ranks. The JDF previously said it did not discriminate based on religion or denomination, but it stated that the force’s strict codes of conduct regarding hair length and the prohibition of marijuana use among its members were the obstacles to Rastafarian participation in the force.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free). However, the prohibition of the Obeah and Myalism religions means that the freedoms listed above do not apply to their members which undermines RoRB and FoRB conditions in Jamaica.

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that has sufficient provisions for both existential recognition and legal registration simultaneously and at different levels of activity; reduce excessive registration fee and revoke vertical registration system.



Japan

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

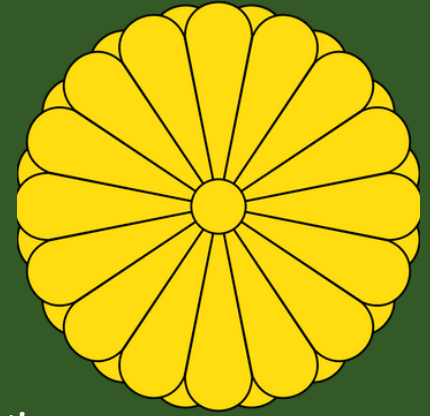
ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Japan is a secular state (Shinto was disestablished in 1947).

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest constitution from 1946 against discrimination on the basis of “creed.”

Human rights instruments: Japan is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Japan did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.



Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Japanese law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government in order to operate legally in the country. The registration process is referred to in law as ‘certification.’ However, gaining registration exempts government-certified religious groups with corporate status from paying income tax on donations and religious offerings used as part of their operational and maintenance expenses. The law requires religious groups applying for corporate status to prove they have a physical space for worship and that their primary purpose is disseminating religious teachings, conducting religious ceremonies, and educating and nurturing believers. An applicant must present, in writing, a three-year record of activities as a religious organisation, a list of members and religious teachers, the rules of the organization, information about the method of making decisions on managing assets, statements of income and expenses for the past three years, and a list of assets. The law stipulates prefectural governors have jurisdiction over groups seeking corporate status in their respective prefecture, and that groups must apply for registration with prefectural governments. Exceptions are granted for groups with offices in multiple prefectures, which they may register with Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, and Science (MEXT). After the MEXT minister or a prefectural governor confirms an applicant meets the legal definition of a certified religious group with corporate status, the law requires the applicant to formulate administrative rules pertaining to its purpose, core personnel, and financial affairs. An applicant becomes a religious corporation only after the MEXT minister or governor approves its application and the applicant subsequently registers. The law requires certified religious corporations to disclose their assets, income, and expenditures to the government. The law also authorises the government to investigate possible violations of regulations governing for-profit activities. Authorities have the right to suspend a religious corporation’s for-profit activities for up to one year if the group violates the regulations. Under the “right of inquiry” provision of the Religious Corporation Act, the government may investigate religious corporations suspected of committing acts that are illegal or are deemed to clearly harm the public welfare. A court may order the dissolution of a religious corporation, consequently revoking its corporate status and tax benefits, if the court finds the corporation has committed such acts. After dissolution, the law does not hinder a religious group from continuing to practice its religion as a noncorporate entity. The law stipulates that worship and religious rituals performed by inmates in penal institutions, alone or in a group, shall not be prohibited. The MOJ offers inmates access to volunteer chaplains from various faiths in prisons. According to the ACA, as of the end of 2021, the most recent year for which statistics were available, central and prefectural governments had certified 179,952 groups as religious groups with corporate status, compared with 180,544 such groups at the end of 2020. The large number reflected the fact that many local units of religious groups registered separately. The government generally certified corporate status for religious groups when they met the requirements.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, informational requirements are excessive (three year record of activities, list of members and leaders), longevity quota, prefecturalisation (as form of provincialisation), the stipulated qualification of a “physical space for worship” is narrow and could be misuse against unfavoured groups or those that do not necessarily engage in worship practices. On October 13, the Tokyo District Court officially accepted a request submitted by MEXT to order the revocation of legal corporate status for the Family Federation in order to “dissolve” the church as a statutory term. On October 12, MEXT Minister Moriyama stated the request was based on the church’s responses to questions regarding its activities and on interviews the National Network of Lawyers against Spiritual Sales conducted with 170 individuals who allegedly suffered financial damages caused by the church. Minister Moriyama said MEXT found the church had systematically continued violating civil law since 1980 by collecting large sums of money in the form of donations and encouraging expensive purchases by a considerable number of its followers in situations that prevented them from making decisions with free will. Minister Moriyama said the church had committed these acts as a corporate organization and caused the followers and their family members enormous financial and mental damages. He cited 32 civilian lawsuits in which the church paid ¥2.2 billion (\$15.5 million) in damages to 169 plaintiffs, as well as additional settlements in and outside court involving 1,550 victims totaling ¥20.4 billion (\$144.2 million). He said the church had met statutory conditions for dissolution, as MEXT judged the church’s acts were “clearly found to harm public welfare substantially” and had “deviated substantially from the purpose of a religious organization prescribed” in the law, the dissemination of religious teachings, the conduct of ceremonies and functions, and the education and nurture of believers. On October 12, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio stated MEXT’s dissolution request was based on “objective facts under law.” This was the government’s first request to dissolve a religious corporation on the basis of a violation of civil law. In a Diet session in 2022, Prime Minister Kishida said the government had previously interpreted a violation of criminal law as a prerequisite for requesting the dissolution of a religious corporation. This interpretation was based on a 1996 court decision, which ordered the dissolution of the group Aum Shinrikyo for systematically producing the chemical agent sarin for mass murder in violation of criminal law. He said that upon further discussion, the government determined it should request dissolution on a case-by-case basis. As a result, the government interpreted it was possible to include a violation of civil law as a prerequisite for requesting the dissolution provided the government found a religious corporation’s acts were systematic, malicious, and continuous. Minister Moriyama publicly stated MEXT concluded the Family Federation’s acts were systematic, malicious, and continuous and submitted the request for the dissolution with the unanimous endorsement of the MEXT advisory council of religious and legal experts.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish procedures for existential recognition and for legal registration, particularly so that the latter process is made distinct from similar processes for secular entities; to become dynamic, establish an independent recognition agency to deal with religious recognition; Revoke the longevity quota, excessive informational requirements and the registration procedure of prefecturalisation.

Jordan, Hashemite Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious



ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Islam is the state religion of Jordan; 16 Christian churches are granted lesser recognition in law including Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Anglican, Maronite Catholic, Lutheran, Syrian Orthodox, Seventh-day Adventist, United Pentecostal, Coptic, Free Evangelical Church, Church of the Nazarene, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Baptist Church; theism is affirmed in the ministerial oath.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2016 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Jordan is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Jordan did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration and recognition policy: discriminatory mandatory registration – the Jordanian government mandates that all non-Islamic religious or belief organisations register with it in order to operate legally in the country. Registration results in what the law refers to as “official recognition.” However, Islamic organisations receive automatic recognition through the constitution and do not need to register with the government. If registered as “denominations,” they may administer rites such as marriage and establish ecclesiastical courts. Recognised religious groups may also own land, open bank accounts, and enter into contracts. Religious groups may alternatively be registered as “religious entities.” Religious entities must work through ecclesiastical courts of recognized denominations on matters such as divorce and inheritance, but they otherwise have all other rights as recognized denominations, such as conducting marriages, owning property, and opening bank accounts. Members of Christian churches recognized under the Law for Councils of Christian Denominations, as well as members of denominations registered as religious entities, may take their denomination-issued marriage certificates to the Civil Status Bureau to receive their government marriage certificates. Recognised denominations and religious entities generally do not need government approval to accept funding from parent churches or certain Christian charities or organisations based outside of the country. Recognised non-Islamic religious groups are tax-exempt but do not receive the government subsidies granted to Islamic religious groups. Religious groups that the government does not recognize as denominations or religious entities lack legal status and may not undertake basic administrative tasks such as opening bank accounts, purchasing real estate, or hiring staff. Individuals may exercise such activities on behalf of the unrecognized group. To register as a recognized religious denomination, the group must submit its bylaws, a list of its members, its budget, and information regarding its religious doctrine to the Ministry of Interior and Prime Minister. In determining whether to register or recognize Christian groups, the Prime Minister confers with the Ministry of Interior and the CCL. Although neither the law nor the constitution explicitly mandate the practice, church and government leaders have stated that the CCL must endorse recognition for new Christian groups prior to the Prime Minister’s approval. To achieve official recognition as denominations, the Ministry of Interior must recommend Christian groups and the cabinet must approve. The government also refers to the following criteria when considering recognition of Christian groups: the group’s teachings must not contradict the nature of the constitution, public ethics, customs, or traditions; the Middle East Council of Churches, a regional body comprising four families of churches (Catholic, Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants), must recognize it; its religious doctrine must not be antagonistic to Islam as the state religion; and the group’s membership must meet a minimum but unspecified number of citizens. An annex to the Law for Councils of Christian Denominations lists 11 officially recognized Christian religious groups: Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Anglican, Maronite Catholic, Lutheran, Syrian Orthodox, Seventh-day Adventist, United Pentecostal, and Coptic. In 2018, five additional evangelical Christian denominations, formerly registered under the Ministry of Justice, were recognized by the Ministry of Interior as religious entities but not as religious denominations and, as a result, none have been permitted to establish an ecclesiastical court: the Free Evangelical Church, Church of the Nazarene, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Baptist Church. Religious groups such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) and Jehovah’s Witnesses are not registered and gather in semi-official or unofficial meetings places. The government improved the ability of the Church of Jesus Christ to operate by granting it legal status as a charitable association through its Latter-day Saint Charities in 2018 and permitted members to gather in semi-official meeting spaces owned by the charity. However, the government requires Church of Jesus Christ members to obtain marriage certificates through officially recognized Christian denominations and does not allow the Church of Jesus Christ to independently own buildings or establish bank accounts. The CCL serves as an administrative body to facilitate tax and customs exemptions, as well as to issue civil documents related to marriage or inheritance. In other matters, such as issuing work permits or purchasing land, the denominations interact directly with the relevant ministries. Religious groups that do not have representatives on the CCL handle administrative tasks through the ministry relevant to the task. Unrecognized Christian groups do not have representatives on the CCL, have no legal status as religious entities, and must have individual members of their groups conduct business with the government on their behalf. The Greek Orthodox Archbishop permanently chairs the presidency of the CCL. According to the constitution, a special provision of the law regulates the activities and administration of finances of the Islamic awqaf. Per this provision of the law, the Ministry of Awqaf manages mosques, appoints imams, pays mosque staff salaries, manages Islamic clergy training centers, and subsidises certain mosque-sponsored activities, such as holiday celebrations and religious observances. Other Islamic institutions are the General Ifaa Department, which issues fatwas; the Supreme (Sharia) Justice Department, headed by the Office of the Supreme (Sharia) Justice (OSJ) and in charge of the Sharia Public Prosecution; the Sharia Courts; and the Sharia Institute. The government mandates imams to adhere to officially prescribed themes for Friday sermons while allowing flexibility in style and delivery. Muslim clergy who do not follow government policy may face suspension, a written warning, a ban from delivering Friday sermons for a certain period, or dismissal from the Ministry of Awqaf. In addition to these administrative measures, a preacher who violates the law may face imprisonment for a period of one week to one month or a fine not to exceed 20 dinars (\$28). According to the constitution, matters of the personal status of non-Muslims whose religion the government officially recognises are under the jurisdiction of denomination-specific courts of religious communities, except for matters of inheritance, when sharia is applied to all persons regardless of religious affiliation. Such ecclesiastical courts exist for the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic, Syrian Orthodox, and Anglican communities. According to the law, members of recognized religious groups lacking their own courts may take their cases to civil courts, which, in principle follow the rules and beliefs of the litigants’ denomination in deciding cases, unless both parties to a case agree to use a specific religious court. There are no tribunals for atheists or adherents of unrecognized religious groups. Such individuals must request a civil court to hear their case. National identification cards issued since 2016 do not list religion, but religious affiliation is still published on birth certificates, contained in records embedded in the identification card’s electronic chip, and remains on file in other government records. National identification cards are renewed every 10 years. Passports do not list religion. Per the ban on conversion from Islam under sharia, converts from Islam are not allowed to change their religion on electronic records. Converts to Islam must change their religion on their civil documents, such as family books (a national registration record issued to every head of family), and on electronic records. Christian converts belonging to unrecognized denominations described personal accounts of security forces summoning them for questioning on several consecutive days, putting their jobs at risk. Some converts to Christianity from Islam reported they continued to worship in secret to avoid scrutiny by security officials. Because of the sharia ban on conversion, government officials generally refused to change the religion listed on official documents from Islam to any other religion. Accordingly, these converts’ religious practice did not match their official religion, exposing them to claims of apostasy and personal status issues involving marriage, divorce, and inheritance. As of 2022, 7,600 mosques in Jordan were registered with the Ministry of Awqaf. Local media reported that number would increase by up to 100 annually. Over 2,700 imams are authorized to deliver sermons. Unofficial mosques continued to operate outside Ministry of Awqaf control in some cities, and imams outside of government employment preached without ministry supervision. Ministry of Awqaf inspections uncovered a very small number of cases of unregistered imams leading prayers in mosques during the year. In these cases, the government ordered all attendees and imams to cease their activities and gather in a designated mosque in their area for the Friday sermons led by a registered imam. Friday prayers in major cities were consolidated into central mosques, over which the Ministry of Awqaf had more oversight, continuing a process that began in 2018. The ministry allowed smaller mosques to continue Friday sermons along with their areas’ central mosque. The government continued its policy of not recognizing the Baha’i Faith but allowed Baha’is to practice their religion and included them in officially sponsored interfaith events. Sharia courts and the courts of other recognized religions continued not to issue Baha’is the marriage certificates required to transfer citizenship to a foreign spouse or to register for government health insurance and social security. The Department of Civil Status and Passports also continued not to recognize marriages conducted by Baha’i assemblies, but it issued family books to Baha’is, allowing them to register their children, except in cases of marriages between a Baha’i man and a Baha’i woman when the marriage was erroneously registered as Muslim. In those cases, the children were considered illegitimate and were not issued birth certificates or included in family books and subsequently were unable to obtain citizenship or register for school. Baha’i parents could generally designate a dash in lieu of assigning Islam or the Christian religion on their children’s birth certificates. There were cases of daughters of Baha’i converts unable to marry Baha’i men because the birth certificates and official documents of the women maintained their religious designation as Islam, the prior faith of their fathers. Some members of the Baha’i Faith reported erroneous religious designations on birth certificates and official documents persisted for third-generation Baha’is. Three recognized cemeteries remained registered in the name of the Baha’i Faith through a special arrangement between the group and the government. Baha’i leaders reported they continued to be unable to register other properties under the name of the Baha’i Faith but remained able to register property under the names of individual Baha’is. In doing so, the Baha’i leaders said they continued to have to pay more registration fees whenever they transferred property from one person to another at the death of the registered owner, a process that created a large financial burden. Baha’i leaders stated concerns that registering properties under individual Baha’is also exposed the individuals to personal legal and financial liabilities. Baha’i leaders said they were using the civil courts to challenge their group’s property registration restrictions, stating they were unable to legally protect Baha’i assets if individuals who registered Baha’i property under their names decided to misappropriate funds or property. The Baha’i community’s request for religious exemptions for property registration fees remained pending. Members of non-Muslim religious groups, especially unregistered groups, continued to report occasional threats by the government to arrest them for disrupting public order if they proselytised Muslims.

Key restriction tools imposed: endorsement from the Council of Church Leaders (CCL) is a *de facto* prerequisite to successful registration, excessive informational requirements and qualifications for registered status, Islamic groups are exemption from mandatory registration requirements, preapproval, state funding is reserved for Islamic groups, vertical recognition is in effect as there is the state religion of Islam and various recognised Christian groups (11 with their own ecclesiastical courts and 5 without) (verticalism), Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to be denied official recognition.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; converts from Islam not recognised by the state); **hieronymy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; all non-Islamic forms illegal); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Dismantle the present restrictive system by removing all instances of partial and vertical recognition; establish procedures for equal existential recognition and legal registration for all groups; revoke the rule of mandatory registration for non-Islamic groups; utilise recognition as a means to promote diversity of belief as a positive component of society and to reaffirm the valid rights of minorities.

Kenya, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Kenya is a secular state; however, theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2010 as does the national anthem and the oath of allegiance for high-ranking politicians.

Protections: Explicit protection is granted in the constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Kenya is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC; Kenya abstained from the UNDRIP; Kenya did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: discriminatory and quasi-mandatory registration – all religious organisations, except those the governments considers to be indigenous and traditional, intending to operate in Kenya must register with the Registrar of Societies which then reports this information to the Office of the Attorney General. Moreover, the registration rate among indigenous religious groups is low. Despite the law officially prohibiting the operations of unregistered or deregistered religious organisations, this law is not frequently enforced in practice. To register, applicants must have valid national identification documents, pay a fee, and undergo security screening. Applicants seeking to register and lead a new religious society are required to hold a diploma or degree from a recognised theological institution. Registered religious institutions and places of worship are exempt from paying tax on tithes, offerings, and donations, as well as duty on imported goods. Religiously-affiliated non-governmental organisations and sub-organisations of a religious group engaging in charity work must register with the NGO Coordination Board. The law requires religious institutions to file annual returns; failure to do so results in deregistration, but the penalty is frequently not enforced. Deregistration may also be appealed. The Ministry of Information, Communications, and Technology must approve regional radio and television broadcast licenses, including for religious organisations.

Recognition policy: the law recognises five systems of marriage: civil, Christian, Hindu, customary, and Islamic.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, indigenous and traditional groups are not required to register, informational requirements such as valid national identification documents imply that group registrants and leaders must be Kenyan nationals, registration fee is undisclosed, there have been no new registered religious groups since 2014 causing a backlog of thousands of applications, the Registrar of Societies deregistered at least five churches during 2023, the government does not recognise any theological certificates for Hindu priests despite gaining a theological certificate being a prerequisite for registering.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Abolish the 2022 law that requires that all religious leaders must hold a theological certificate from an educational institution to register; abolish the discriminatory and quasi-mandatory registration order; the suggestion by the state committee that umbrella religious bodies should be established and that more government oversight of religious activity in Kenya is concerning and must be monitored internationally.



Kiribati, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Kiribati is officially a secular state; however, Christianity receives state privilege; theism was also affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2013.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2013 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Kiribati is party to the UNCRC; Kiribati is neither a signatory nor a party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR or the UNDRIP; Kiribati did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: conditional quasi-mandatory registration – although Kiribati law mandates that all religious or belief organisations with a membership of equal to or greater than two percent of the total population according to the most recent census must register with the government, there are no legal consequences for not registering. To register, the religious organization submits a request to the Ministry of Women, Youth, and Social Affairs, signed by the head of the group and supported by five other members of the organisation. Also required in the request is information regarding proof of the number of adherents and the religious denomination and name under which the group wishes to be registered. The government allowed missionary visits to islands with a “one church” tradition provided prospective missionaries follow the traditional practice of requesting permission from local leaders. Sources stated that minority religious groups did not attempt to send any missionaries to these islands during the year. The government allowed the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC) to operate, but the church was not able to register during the year due to a court case and opposition to its registration from the Kiribati Uniting Church, according to KPC leadership. The church’s registration application was submitted when it separated from the Kiribati Uniting Church in 2016, and church officials said they were optimistic the government would grant registration due to the government’s grant support for its activities.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, informational requirements are excessive (including proof of number of adherents), membership quota (no less than 2%), signature quota.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish distinct provisions for existential recognition and legal registration within a recognition system that caters to all groups and at different levels of activity as is described in the Dynamic level of the Spectrum of Religious Recognition; revoke the rule of mandatory registration for religious organisations and groups representing more than 2% of the population; the apathetic approach of the government means that some aspects of religious life are left vague in the legislation which may be the cause for some islands dominated by one group to violate religious freedoms (as reported by Freedom House).



Korea, Democratic People's Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal



FoRB Claim: Partial claim is made that constricts FoRB to the construction of religious buildings and hosting worship services. The latest revised constitution from 2016 stated that, “Religion must not be used as a pretext for drawing in foreign forces or for harming the state or social order.”

Secularity: North Korea is a hypersecular state that professes state atheism; the official state ideology is a combination of Juche and Kimilsungism – Kimjongilism.

Protections: No protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2019 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: North Korea is party to the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; North Korea has attempted to revoke its ratification of the ICCPR; North Korea did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: non-registration.

Registration policy: non-registration – there are currently no established procedures for the legal registration of religious or belief organisations. The government encourages all citizens to report anyone engaged in unauthorised religious activity or in possession of religious materials. The places of worship operating in the capital Pyongyang act as showpieces or token churches for foreigners rather than autonomously run religious organisations. The country’s criminal code punishes a “person who, without authorisation, imports, makes, distributes, or illegally keeps drawings, photographs, books, video recordings, or electronic media that reflect decadent, carnal, or foul contents.” The criminal code also bans “engaging in superstitious activities in exchange for money or goods,” as well as “encouraging others to engage in superstitious activities,” with punishments of up to seven years in a labor camp. According to local sources, this prohibition includes fortune telling. According to the NGO Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK), under these two provisions, ownership of religious materials brought in from abroad is illegal and punishable by imprisonment and other forms of severe punishment, including execution. The law specifically prohibits participation in ‘religious and superstitious activities’ by “young people.” There were reports of private Christian religious activity, although the existence of underground churches and the scope of underground religious networks remained difficult to quantify. Escapee accounts indicated religious practitioners often concealed their activities from family members, neighbours, coworkers, and others due to fear of being branded as disloyal and concerns their activities would be reported to authorities. Some defectors and NGOs reported unapproved religious materials were available clandestinely. A Korea Future report in 2022 stated the state ideology of “Kimilsungism – Kimjongilism” (adherence to the teachings of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il) had many hallmarks of religion, and the state presents the two leaders as “extraordinary beings” in official materials and authorised texts.

Key restriction tools imposed: non-recognition for any religion and no procedures exist for the genuine registration of religious organisations, state ownership of religion, there are state-sanctioned religious organisations representing Buddhism, Catholicism, Cheondoism, Orthodox Christianity, and Protestantism which receive pseudo-recognition, token churches are constructed and run by the government, weaponisation of the term “superstitious”.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; illegal); **hieronymy** (not free; all religious materials are illegal); **monasticism** (not free; highly restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; illegal); **pastoral services** (not free; highly restricted); **private expression and observance** (not free); **proselytism** (not free; illegal); **public expression and observance** (not free; illegal); **receiving donations** (not free; illegal); **religious buildings** (not free; illegal); **religious instruction** (not free; illegal); **religious literature** (not free; illegal); **religious and worship services** (not free; state-sanctioned churches); **religious trade** (not free; illegal).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the country’s repressive system for inhibiting all forms of religious activity would need to be conducted before any further recommendations could be made to improve the situation further; although North Korea is provided with the classification of Terminal in the Spectrum of Religious Recognition, the country should ideally be given its own even lower classification as no other country can compare to how North Korea violates freedom of religion or belief.

Korea, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: **Receptive**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: **South Korea is a secular state.**

Protections: **Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 1987 against discrimination on the basis of religion.**

Human rights instruments: **South Korea is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; South Korea did not vote on the UDHR.**

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – although South Korean law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally in the country, religious or belief organisations with property valued at less than 300 million won (\$231,000) cannot access registration. If a religious or belief fulfils the financial quota, it can become a government-recognised religious organisation by publishing its internal regulations defining the group's purpose and activities, its meeting minutes of the group's first gathering, and a list of executives and employees. To obtain tax benefits, including exemption from acquisition or registration taxes when purchasing or selling property to be used for religious purposes, organizations must submit to the local government their registration as a religious and nonprofit corporate body, an application for local tax exemption, and a contract showing the acquisition or sale of property. All clergy are taxed on earned yearly income, but clergy are exempt from taxation on education, food, transportation, and childcare expenses. Individual laypersons are eligible for income tax deductions for contributions to religious organisations upon submission of receipts for the donations.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, financial quota, localisation of procedures and the necessity to own property to gain tax-exempt status.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Remove restrictive financial quotas and excessive informational requirements from the registration process as well as revoke the localisation of those procedures.

Kosovo, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: **Restrictive**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Kosovo is officially a secular state; the 2006 law on religious freedom specifically mentioned the SOC, Roman Catholic Church, Evangelical Church (which is interpreted by the government to include all Protestant denominations), Kosovo Islamic Community and Hebrew Belief Community.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2016 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Kosovo is not partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Kosovo did not vote on the UDHR; Kosovo is not partied to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **non-registration.**

Registration policy: non-registration – there are no procedures for legal registration provided by the government yet neither does the government mandate that religious groups register with it in order to operate legally in Kosovo. Without legal status, religious communities may not own property, open bank accounts, employ staff, or access the courts as a collective entity. Individual congregations or individuals, however, may do so and perform other administrative tasks in their own name. Local communities often recognize religious groups' possession of buildings; however, the law generally does not protect these buildings as property of a religious community, but rather as the private property of citizens or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). SOC property is an exception; the law on special protective zones (SPZs) acknowledges and protects the integrity of SOC property ownership and stewardship over designated areas within the SPZs. The law provides religious communities exemptions from income tax, value added taxes, immovable property taxes, and customs duties, but these benefits are unevenly enforced. The law stipulates the rights to establish humanitarian/charity organizations, accept voluntary financial contributions from individuals and institutions, and engage in national and international communication for religious purposes. The law on registering NGOs, however, does not apply to "religious communities, religious centers, or temples," which prevents religious groups from registering as NGOs and also prohibits NGOs from conducting religious activity in the country. In March 2023, the government submitted to the Assembly proposed amendments to the law on religious freedom that would permit religious groups to acquire legal status, conduct business and acquire real and personal property in their name, open bank accounts, and gain import tax benefits. As of year's end, the Assembly had not voted on the amendments. Absent enactment of the legislation, all religious communities said they continued to operate bank accounts registered to individuals instead of communities. The UKT reported that the government's Agency of Statistics did not take into account UKT recommendations on the draft census questionnaire, which restricted individuals from self-identifying with a religious community beyond "Islamic, Orthodox, or Catholic" and therefore did not provide an opportunity for some religious groups, such as the Tarikats, to self-identify as distinct communities. The Union of Kosovo Tarikats (UKT), which also supports the right of all individuals and groups to self-identify as not practicing any religion, said the draft questionnaire did not include an option to select no religion, either. Because the Tax Administration revoked the UKT's fiscal number certificate in 2022, the UKT said it remained unable to open bank accounts and benefit from customs exemptions. According to the UKT, the Tax Administration cited as justification the absence of Tarikats as a distinct religious group according to the law on religious freedom. The Water Services Regulatory Authority stated it once again waived water utility fees during the year for religious buildings owned by religious communities. By law, however, it could not waive water utility fees for buildings rented by religious communities, which disproportionately affected smaller religious communities because most of them rented facilities. The KPEC again said the government's official calendar of holidays referred to "Catholic" or "Orthodox" holidays but not "Christian" or "Protestant" holidays. The KPEC stated the government's lack of advocacy for religious minorities contributed to a perceived climate of discrimination. The KPEC also said the presence of Islamic symbols in some public buildings contributed to a perception of Muslim influence over government institutions.

Key restriction tools imposed: barring unrecognised religious communities from obtaining legal registered status, indirect registration, vertical recognition system is in effect as some religious communities are recognised and others not (verticalism), weaponisation of the term "traditional".

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that in the country that has the capacity to both existentially recognise and legally register all religious and belief groups simultaneously and at multiple levels of activity (from belief systems, to denominations, to single religious buildings); tighten up or remove subjective language from the legislation that is vulnerable to misuse by authorities as a means of inhibiting religious activity, especially by non-traditional groups; revoke indirect registration, stop barring unrecognised religious communities from obtaining legal status, revoke the weaponisation of terms as well as the vertical nature of the recognition system.

Kuwait, State of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious



ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Islam is the state religion of Kuwait; as such, theism was affirmed in the reinstated constitution from 1992; the same constitution declares that the Amir must be Muslim and that the state shall safeguard the heritage of Islam; only religious figures in Christianity and Judaism that are also recognised in Islamic orthodoxy are protected under anti-defamation and denigration laws.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2016 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Kuwait is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Kuwait did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: non-registration.

Registration policy: indirect registration – there is no officially published process outlining the steps religious or belief organisations must take to register with the government. Government offices do not offer guidance on the registration process. There are no fixed criteria for an application to be approved. To register an official place of worship and gain benefits from the central government, a religious group must first receive approval for its place of worship from the local municipality. Previously, religious groups reported the municipality would pass the paperwork to the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs (MAIA) for an “opinion” on the application for a worship space. MAIA would then issue a certificate listing board members for the organization, making the religious group a legal entity, followed by approvals from the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) and the Ministry of Interior (MOI). During the year, embassy officials met with the Undersecretary of MAIA and MFA representatives who stated the Council of Ministers had assigned the MFA, Ministry of Justice (MOJ), and MAIA to create a unified department dedicated to managing administrative affairs for minority faith groups. This department would include responsibilities such as processing state registration for non-registered religious communities. Until the establishment of this department, no government agency handled registration for non-registered communities. Meanwhile, MAIA is handling administrative tasks for registered religious communities only. The officially registered Christian churches in the country are the National Evangelical Church of Kuwait (NECK) (Protestant); Roman Catholic; Greek Catholic (Melkite); Coptic Orthodox; Armenian Orthodox; Greek Orthodox; Anglican; and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. There are no officially recognised synagogues, and, according to MAIA, none have ever applied for official recognition. The government has not registered any non-Abrahamic religious communities. Non-registered religious groups include Hindus, Sikhs, Druze, Bohra Muslims, Buddhists, and Baha'is. A religious group with a registered place of worship may hire staff, sponsor visitors to the country, open bank accounts, and import religious materials for its congregation. Non-registered religious groups may not purchase property or sponsor workers and must rely on volunteers from within their community for resources. Some registered religious groups, such as NECK, have agreed to assist non-registered groups in these matters. The law does not specifically prohibit proselytising by non-Muslims, but individuals proselytising may be prosecuted under laws criminalising contempt of religion. If a religious group wishes to purchase land, a citizen must be the primary buyer and must submit a request for approval to the local municipal council, which allocates land at its discretion. Citizens, or in a few cases the government, may also lease land to religious groups. An individual's religion is not included on passports or national identity documents except for birth and marriage certificates, on which it is mandatory. On birth certificates issued to Muslims, there is no distinction between Sunni and Shia. Members of non-Abrahamic faiths are not able to list their religion on their birth certificate and a dash (-) is denoted in place of their religion. The MOI, in coordination with PAM, issued visas for clergy and other staff to work at registered places of worship. The government continued to impose quotas on the number of clergy and staff of registered religious groups entering the country but sometimes granted additional slots upon request. Church leaders stated that within the past year, the MOI had granted significantly fewer visas for clergy and other staff, which affected their daily operations, especially for registered churches with multiple congregations and thousands of worshippers. The government continued to require foreign leaders of unregistered religious groups to enter the country as nonreligious workers. Only Muslims and Christians are permitted to pray communally and possess religious literature while detained. Authorities allowed Muslim imams and Christian clergy access to prisoners and detainees for religious observance, but unrecognized religions did not have this privilege.

Key restriction tools imposed: multi-registration is imposed for places of worship, pseudo-recognition is granted to eight Christian groups, state definition of religion, the government of Kuwait has a non-recognition policy for any non-Abrahamic religion or religions it views as non-Abrahamic, vertical recognition is in effect (verticalism). The law bans certain topics from publication and public discussion. These include insulting religion, in particular Islam, and “sorcery.” The law prohibits practices the government deems inconsistent with Islamic law, including anything the government deems to be “sorcery” or “black magic,” which under the penal code constitutes “fraud and deception” and carries a maximum penalty of three years' imprisonment, a fine, or both. In January, the MOJ arrested a foreign labourer for possession of items allegedly used in acts of “sorcery.” Representatives of registered churches said the government was generally tolerant and respectful of their faiths. Members of non-Abrahamic faiths and unregistered churches said they remained free to practice their religion in private but faced harassment and potential prosecution if they disturbed their neighbours or violated laws regarding assembly and proselytizing. They also said they avoided conflict with authorities by not proselytizing or disparaging the government or other faiths. The government continued to allow non-Abrahamic faith groups to operate in rented villas, private homes, or the facilities of registered churches. Many of these groups stated they did not publicly advertise religious events or gatherings to avoid bringing unwanted attention to their organisations, either from the public or from government authorities. Leaders of registered churches reported government authorities continued to allow only citizens to sign official documents, even if the citizens were not among the churches' ordained clergy. If there were no citizen members, authorities continued to recognize the highest church authority as the official signatory of the church. To address the problem, some churches opted to have their members' documents initially attested by their respective embassies before submitting them to local authorities. Members of non-Abrahamic faiths and unregistered churches said they experienced difficulties in celebrating major religious or life events. Many members said they lacked adequate facilities but noted clerical support for prayers, blessings of births and marriages, and conducting proper death rituals is available. In many cases, members of these religious groups stated they resolved conflicts, such as child separation issues, divorce, marital status, or inheritance, within their communities rather than in the courts, where they would be subject to sharia. The government continued to require religious groups to obtain registration from their municipalities for religious celebrations. Authorities retained the right to withdraw the registration of any husseniya not complying with the municipality's rules. Minority religious communities continued to state they tried to keep a low profile and did not request permission for public celebrations from authorities, since they presumed authorities would reject their request. The MOI continued to provide security and protection at religious sites for all recognized non-Sunni religious groups. Muslim and Christian leaders said that the government, citing security concerns, kept in place a ban on outdoor religious observances instituted following the 2015 ISIS bombing of a Shia mosque that killed 27 persons. The government also continued to station security forces throughout the year outside major Sunni mosques and all Shia and Christian religious venues during times of worship to deter attacks. The government also continued to provide security to Shia neighbourhoods during Muharram and Ashura observances. The government allowed only shops owned by registered religious organizations to import, display, or sell non-Islamic religious literature. The government did not allow non-Islamic religious publishing companies to operate, although several churches published religious materials solely for their congregations' use. Church leaders said the government permitted registered churches to import religious materials for use by their congregations if none of the content insulted Islam. Registered churches reported they could import religious materials in any language. According to the Ministry of Information, MAIA reviewed books of a religious nature. Members of non-Abrahamic faiths and non-registered churches said they could import religious materials for their congregations if they brought in the materials as personal items when entering the country and did not try to sell them in public stores. While minority religious communities stated they continued to be selective in the religious materials they imported, and even more selective in giving access to the materials, many members noted this was less of an issue during the year because their activities had moved almost entirely online during the pandemic. They said they did not allow the circulation of these materials outside their congregations. Municipalities handled building permits and land issues for religious groups. The government stated it received no applications for the construction of places of worship from non-Islamic religious groups during the year. The government reported it did not receive additional requests for registrations of new groups during the year. During a meeting with nine leaders of registered and non-registered churches in March, the leaders agreed that Christians in the country did not face harassment. Nevertheless, the leaders shared concerns that churches had no assigned government agency or department to address their issues. The leader of one non-registered church said his church was interested in registering, but there was no publicly available information on how to register. The leaders estimated there were approximately 100 unregistered churches operating in the country and reported that approximately two years prior, PAM imposed restrictions on the number of new visas for which churches could apply on behalf of their clergy. Shia community members reported a continued lack of facilities for worship and difficulties obtaining permission to construct new facilities or approving repairs to existing facilities due to government delay. As of December, MAIA reported there were 1,776 mosques in the country, including over 100 Shia mosques. MAIA reported there were 2,034 imams registered with the ministry. MAIA reported there were over 570 registered husseniyyas and more that were not registered. Typically, husseniyyas are not obliged to register with MAIA, as MAIA perceives them as social gathering places rather than religious institutions. The government instructed MAIA, the MOI, the Kuwait City municipality, and other entities to end the use of unregistered mosques. MAIA continued to operate under a mandate from the Council of Ministers to demolish unregistered mosques, stating that some of those mosques served as extremist platforms. Authorities did not report whether there were new, non-registered mosques opened during the year or whether any nonregistered mosques were closed during the year.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarchy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; illegal for non-Muslims); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the present system that inhibits the vast majority of religious activities; this process must take place first before Kuwait can be reclassified as Restrictive; revoke the vertical orientation of the recognition system and multi-registration.

Kyrgyz Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Kyrgyzstan is a secular state; Russian Orthodoxy and Sunni Islam are recognised as the traditional religions and are treated more favourably.

Protections: Protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2016 against discrimination on the basis of belief only.

Human rights instruments: Kyrgyzstan is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC; Kyrgyzstan is not party to the UNDRIP nor did it vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.



Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Kyrgyz law mandates that all religious or belief organisations register with the State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA) to operate legally in the country. The law prohibits activities by unregistered religious groups, including renting space and holding religious services, including in private homes. Failure to register can lead to a fine of 7,500 som (\$84) for individuals and 23,000 som (\$260) for legal entities. Groups applying for registration must submit an application that includes an organisational charter, minutes of the organizing meeting, and a list of founding members. Each congregation of a religious group must register separately and must have at least 200 resident founding citizens. Foreign religious organizations are required to renew their registrations with the SCRA annually. Although a 2016 Supreme Court decision nullified the requirement that religious groups register with local councils to establish new places of worship, in practice, the SCRA still maintains this requirement. The SCRA is legally authorised to deny the registration of a religious group if it does not comply with the law or is considered a threat to national security, social stability, interethnic and interdenominational harmony, public order, health, or morality. The SCRA may also deny or postpone the registration of a particular religious group if it deems the proposed activities of the group are not religious in character. Denied applicants may reapply at any time or may appeal to the courts. After the SCRA approves a group's registration as a religious entity, the group must register with the Ministry of Justice to obtain status as a legal entity in order to own property, open bank accounts, or otherwise engage in contractual activities. The organization must submit an application to the ministry that includes a group charter with an administrative structure and a list of board and founding members. By law, religious groups are designated as nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) exempt from taxes on their religious activities. If a religious group engages in a commercial activity, it is required to pay taxes on that activity. The law gives the SCRA authority to ban a religious group in cases in which courts concur that a religious organization has undermined the security of the state; undertaken actions aimed at forcibly changing the foundations of the constitutional system; created armed forces or propaganda advocating war or terrorism; engaged in the encroachment on the rights of citizens or obstruction of compulsory education of children; coerced members to remit their property to the religious group; or encouraged citizens to refuse to fulfill their civil obligations and break the law. The affected religious group may appeal the decision in the courts. According to the law, only individuals representing registered religious organizations may conduct missionary activity. If a foreign missionary represents an organization approved by the SCRA, the individual must apply for a visa with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Visas are valid for up to one year, and a missionary is allowed to work three consecutive years in the country. All foreign religious entities, including missionaries, must operate within these restrictions and must reregister annually. Representatives of religious groups acting inconsistently with the law may be fined or deported. Violations of the law may result in fines of 1,000 som (\$11), and deportation in the case of foreign missionaries. The law provides for the right of registered religious groups to produce, import, export, and distribute religious literature and materials in accordance with established procedures, which may include examination by state experts. The law does not require government examination of religious materials (such as literature and other printed or audio or video materials), and it does not define the criteria for state religious experts. The law prohibits the distribution of religious literature and materials in public locations or in visits to individual households, schools, or other institutions. The law specifies fines based on the nature of the violations and requires law enforcement officials to demonstrate an intent to distribute extremist materials before arresting a suspect. There continued to be no specified procedure used by the SCRA for hiring or evaluating the experts who examined religious literature that groups intended to distribute within their places of worship. According to religious studies academics, the SCRA continued to choose its own employees and religious scholars whom the agency contracted to serve as experts. Attorneys for religious groups continued to state the experts chosen by the SCRA were biased in favor of prosecutors and were not formal experts under the criminal procedure code. The State Forensic Service, with support from SCRA on religious matters, screened the content of websites, printed material, and other forms of media for extremist content.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, annual reregistration is made mandatory for GFOs, broad grounds are given for the denial of registration which are likely to be misused against religious groups unfavoured by the state, dual registration, each new place of worship continue to have to register with a local council to operate legally despite the 2016 nullification of this law, informational requirements are excessive (namely a list of founding members) due to the likelihood of their misuse, localisation of registration procedures down to each congregation, membership and signature quotas, unregistration is prohibited, excessive authority is granted to the SCRA to ban religious groups it does not approve of. The law prohibits “persistent actions aimed at converting followers of one religion to another” and “illegal missionary activity,” defined as missionary activity of groups not registered with the SCRA, a government organization composed of presidential appointees that is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the law’s provisions on religion. The law also prohibits the involvement of minors in organized, proselytizing religious groups unless a parent grants written consent. The law prohibits the distribution of religious literature, including printed, audio, and video materials, in public places, including streets, apartment buildings, children’s institutions, and schools. In March, SCRA representatives, security personnel from the GKNB, and the Talas police department raided St. Nicholas Catholic Church in Talas after a Sunday evening Mass. Persons leaving the state-registered church were forced back into the church by officers, some of whom were carrying weapons. Security personnel accused two Slovak nuns of “illegal missionary activities” and did not allow congregants to depart the church until the two nuns had signed a statement admitting illegal missionary activities” and “spreading their ideology.” The SCRA fined the nuns 7,500 soms (\$82) for carrying out religious activities without SCRA registration. The Catholic Apostolic Administration appealed the fines. Three days after the raid on St Nicholas Church, the SCRA wrote a letter to the Catholic Apostolic Administration in Bishkek stating that the SCRA would “take action against the Apostolic Administration in Kyrgyzstan for its liquidation” if more violations occurred. In June, two foreign citizens at a registered Protestant church in Bishkek were fined for “illegal missionary activity” after a raid by state officials. In June, authorities fined a Christian religious organization for conducting its services with the participation of foreign missionaries who did not have permission to conduct religious activities. One of the missionaries subsequently applied for a registration with SCRA, which rejected the application. Police then detained a local representative of the organization for allegedly offering a bribe to a GKNB employee to solve the registration issue. In August, the government, including representatives from the SCRA and security services, conducted raids on houses of worship in the southern Osh region, and shut down 29 mosques and 21 madrassahs. An additional 48 mosques and 40 madrassahs received an administrative fine. In the southern Batken region, the government conducted similar raids and shut down 32 mosques and 5 madrassahs. An additional 55 mosques and 6 madrassahs received an administrative fine. In the western Talas region, government inspections found 172 mosques and namazkanas (prayer rooms) violated fire safety regulations and 107 violated sanitary and hygienic standards. In addition, 5 mosques and 29 religious entities were operating without official SCRA registration. According to government statements following the raids, the mosques that were closed did not have official documents or registration and were built in violation of established architectural and construction standards. NGOs reported that the government continued to arrest social media users who posted digital content that the government considered extremist, especially religious literature connected to banned groups. The government defined extremist activity as membership in a banned, “religiously oriented” organization, distribution of literature associated with a banned organization, or proselytizing on behalf of, or financing, a banned organization. According to the latest statistics available, in 2022, the government initiated at least 246 cases under charges of “preparing or distributing extremist material,” including the distribution of material over the internet, compared to 467 cases in 2020. NGOs also noted, as in past years, that the number of arrests was higher among ethnic Uzbek communities in the south, and that police continued to target and harass ethnic Uzbeks, usually in connection with the possession of banned religious literature or support of banned organizations. NGOs said some cases of harassment and arrests were based on false testimony or planted evidence. Jehovah’s Witnesses reported that the SCRA continued to refuse to register their local houses of worship in the south of the country, although the organization is registered in Bishkek. In June, the Supreme Court ruled to uphold previous decisions by the Constitutional Court in November 2022. The SCRA denied the registration of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ congregations in the Osh, Naryn, and Jalalabad regions, based on the SCRA continuing to interpret the law as requiring religious groups to register with local councils to establish new places of worship. The SCRA continued to impose the requirement despite a finding by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2019 that it was in violation of Article 18 of the ICCPR, which covers religious freedom, as well as in violation of both the Kyrgyz Constitution and a 2016 Supreme Court ruling stipulating that the requirement was unconstitutional. According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, the SCRA stated that the UNHRC was not an international tribunal and that its views must only be considered, not implemented. Jehovah’s Witnesses representatives stated that, following unsuccessful attempts in 2019 and 2020, they did not file any new registration applications in 2023 and were reluctant to take any more action while the criminal case against them from the March 2021 government raid remained open. Minority religious groups continued to report the SCRA registration process was cumbersome, pointing in particular to the requirement to collect 200 signatures from citizens who identify as adherents. According to the Baptist Union, community members who opposed the establishment of Christian groups continued to pressure adherents not to provide their signatures. Christian activists continued to say that obtaining the formal approval of local governments remained an obstacle to registration, since local governments often rejected Christian organizations without a legal justification by asserting without evidence that area residents opposed the spread of Christianity to their communities. Without registration, Tengrists remained unable to worship publicly or distribute religious material. The Tengrists last attempted to register as a religious group in 2018. In 2021, an SCRA official stated that the SCRA viewed Tengrism as a collection of traditional beliefs, rather than a religion. While the law does not require examination by authorities of all religious literature and materials, religious groups, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, again stated that the SCRA required they submit 100 percent of their imported religious material for review. According to Jehovah’s Witness representatives, the SCRA continued its practice of having individuals designated by the SCRA as experts examine imported religious materials submitted for review by religious organizations, although the law did not mandate such a review. The SCRA denied the Jehovah’s Witnesses permission to import a number of religious booklets, such as one published annually in 302 languages, including Kyrgyz.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); hierarchy (not free; subject to preapproval by the government); monasticism (not free; subject to registration); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; restricted); public expression and observance (not free; restricted); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (not free; subject to registration); religious literature (not free; restricted); religious and worship services (not free; subject to registration); religious trade (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the system to restrict religious activity and of the abusive system of registration that purely exists to stop groups the government does not approve of from congregating; revoke all identified restriction tools in the registration system.

Lao People's Democratic Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Laos is a hypersecular state that practices de facto state atheism (Theravada Buddhism was disestablished in 1975); however, exclusive privileges are granted to Theravada Buddhism; official ideology (Marxism-Leninism); the government officially recognises Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.

Protections: Protection was granted in the latest revised constitution from 2016 against discrimination on the basis of belief only.

Human rights instruments: Laos is party to the ICCPR (but with a reservation on Article 18), the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Laos did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Decree 315, issued in by the Laotian government in 2016, mandates that all religious groups register with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) to conduct any activities legally in the country. Groups may, but are not required to, affiliate with an officially recognised religious group. Under the decree, religious groups must present information on elected or appointed religious leaders to national-, provincial-, district-, and village-level MOHA offices for review and certification. Religious groups operating in multiple provinces must obtain national MOHA approval; groups operating in multiple districts must obtain provincial-level approval; and groups operating in multiple villages are required to obtain district-level approval. If a group seeks to operate beyond its local congregation, it must obtain approval at the corresponding level. A religious activity occurring outside a religious group's property requires approval from village authorities. Activities in another village require approval from district authorities; from provincial authorities for activities in another district; and from national authorities for activities in another province. Religious groups must submit annual plans of all activities in advance, including routine events, for local authorities to review and approve. The decree states that nearly all aspects of religious practice – such as congregating, holding religious services, travel of religious officials, building houses of worship, modifying existing structures, and establishing new congregations in villages where none existed – require permission from a provincial, district-level, and/or central MOHA office. MOHA may order the cessation of any religious activity or expression of beliefs not in agreement with policies, traditional customs, laws, or regulations within its jurisdiction. It may stop any religious activity it deems to threaten national stability, peace, and social order, cause serious damage to the environment, or affect national solidarity or unity among tribes and religions, including threats to the lives, property, health, or reputations of others. The decree requires MOHA to collect information and statistics on religious operations, cooperate with foreign countries and international organizations regarding religious activities, and report religious activities to the government. The decree states the government may sponsor Buddhist facilities, incorporate Buddhist rituals and ceremonies in state functions, and promote Buddhism as an element of the country's cultural and spiritual identity and as the predominant religion of the country. While sponsorship does not include government funding, it may include in-kind contributions or participation by high-level leaders in a Buddhist activity to help generate increased financial contributions from other sources. The decree requires Buddhist clergy to hold identification cards, and clergy of other religions are required to hold certificates issued by their own religious organizations to confirm they have received legitimate religious training. Per Decree 315, the building permit process for constructing houses of worship begins with an application to local authorities and then requires district, provincial, and ultimately central-level LFND and MOHA permission. All houses of worship must register under the law and conform to applicable regulations. Religious organizations must own 5,000 square meters (54,000 square feet, or 1.24 acres) of land to construct a place of worship. MOHA officials at all levels must approve plans for any maintenance, restoration, or construction activities at religious facilities in advance. Local authorities may provide input regarding the building, care, and maintenance of religious facilities, present their findings to their respective provincial governors and city mayors for consideration, and subsequently request MOHA officials review and approve activities conducted in religious facilities. Individuals entering the clergy for more than three months require prior approval from district and village authorities, agreement from the receiving religious establishment, and agreement from a guardian or spouse, if applicable. For a period of less than three months, the village authority as well as a guardian or spouse, if applicable, must first approve. The shorter period stipulations are particularly relevant to Buddhists because every Buddhist male is expected to enter the monkhood at least once in his life, often for fewer than three months. MOES and MOHA must approve the travel abroad of clergy and religious teachers for specialised studies. Students going abroad for any kind of study (including religious studies) generally require prior MOES approval. Domestic religious organizations that also conduct religious activities overseas must receive approval from MOHA. The government controls the distribution of written materials for religious audiences. Decree 315 regulates the importation and printing of religious materials and production of books, documents, icons, and symbols of various religions. The Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism and MOHA must approve religious texts or other materials before they are imported. MOHA may require religious groups to certify that the imported materials are truly representative of their respective religions, address issues of authenticity, and ensure imported materials comport with values and practices in the country. The law prohibits the import or export of unapproved printed or electronic religious materials.

Key restriction tools imposed: capacity quota, confinement, broad grounds for deregistration are likely to see their misuse against religious groups unfavoured by the state, excessive informational requirements regarding elected religious leaders, excessive monitoring requirements, mandatory registration of places of worship, preapproval, pseudo-recognition is also extended to Christianity, Islam and the Baha'i Faith who despite being recognised members continue to face undue restrictions violating FORB, separate excessive monitoring requirements are imposed on places of worship, vertical recognition is in effect (verticalism). MOHA officials stated no new religious groups were approved or denied registration during the year and that review of registration applications already in process continued. According to religious leaders, MOHA continued to request some Christian groups seeking registration, such as the Church of Jesus Christ and the Methodist Church, to consider registering under one of the three Christian groups that were recognized already, the Catholic Church, LEC, or Seventh-day Adventists. The religious leaders said this request may have been the result of the government not having sufficient staff or resources to process pending applications. Religious groups continued to report problems obtaining the proper legal titles for parcels of land for places of worship. MOHA officials required groups to place land titles in the name of the religious group rather than in the name of a member or religious leader. Religious groups, however, reported experiencing lengthy delays with the Department of Land of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment when they sought to change names on their titles. The local leader of the Church of Jesus Christ said the church continued to seek registration, a process begun in 2021, but that during the year, it was unable to comply with MOHA's requirement that it first transfer the name on a land title from an individual to the church before resubmitting a registration application. According to a MOHA official, the ministry continued to meet with unregistered groups to answer questions about the registration process but did so infrequently. MOHA officials also held quarterly meetings with all registered religious groups. In these meetings, religious leaders said, increased opportunities to express concerns and report on their groups' activities. Unregistered religious groups reported, however, that MOHA prohibited their attendance as observers. At the September quarterly meeting, MOHA invited officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to attend for the first time. Although Decree 315 prohibits members of religious groups not registered with MOHA or LFND from practicing their faith, some members of unregistered groups stated they continued to do so for several years quietly and without interference, often in home churches. Other religious leaders said, however, that local authorities in many areas still considered group worship in homes illegal and advised villagers they needed permits to worship in groups at a private home. Some registered religious groups, including the LEC, reported continuing to experience threats and intimidation during worship services conducted at house churches. Local authorities in Somburi District, Savannakhet Province, disrupted a service in a house church on October 1, threatening arrest and fines, according to media reports. Authorities stated the Christians angered the spirits in the village by converting to Christianity and threatened to impose penalties on the Christian villagers if non-Christian villagers became ill or died. Media sources further stated that in 2019, 180 of the villagers converted to Christianity, but the number had declined to 15. The NGO Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom attributed the renunciations to official coercion and threats. While religious groups continued to state Decree 315 further clarified processes for meeting administrative requirements, some requirements remained burdensome and restrictive when fully enforced. Among these were requirements to submit detailed travel plans of group leaders and requests for government approval in advance to hold basic religious services or activities, which some religious groups continued to state the government did not fully or uniformly enforce. Religious leaders continued to report various incidents throughout the country related to the requirement that they seek permission prior to travel. Some religious leaders stated authorities sometimes detained Christians who were traveling without permission to attend religious events outside their regular locales. Several minority religious group leaders also continued to report that they often traveled, both within the country and abroad, without prior government approval because obtaining permission took too much time and officials often ultimately denied the requests. MOHA officials acknowledged the difficulties related to these travel requirements and stated that they would address them in planned draft legislation that would ultimately replace Decree 315. According to Catholic Church officials, the government continued to routinely monitor their members and leaders ostensibly to protect against foreign influence. Church leaders also said the government often monitored foreigners attending services at the Sacred Heart Catholic Church. Religious leaders said the government continued to strictly enforce a prohibition, including on foreigners, against proselytizing in public areas. The government did not restrict proselytizing inside recognized places of worship. Both the Church of Jesus Christ and Seventh-day Adventists reported they had missionaries in the country but that the government restricted their activities to teaching English and promoting good health practices, such as hygiene and sanitation. The government did not permit missionaries to engage in religious discussions with nonmembers of their religious group outside their places of worship. Representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church said they relied on informal person-to-person communication to attract new members. Authorities continued to control imports of religious materials, but several groups said they could access most religious texts and documents online. MOHA officials again said they coordinated with religious groups to review imported materials to ensure these were in accordance with the organisation's beliefs. Due to these requirements, sources from the Baha'i community and other groups again said they chose to produce and print their own religious documents in the country. Some sources said the legal requirement that a religious organization own 5,000 square meters (54,000 square feet, or 1.24 acres) of land to build a church or temple limited some smaller congregations, which lacked sufficient resources to obtain a space of that size. Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders said the largest Seventh-day Adventist church, located in Vientiane, set on less than 3,200 square meters (25,000 square feet). Construction also commenced on a Seventh-day Adventist church in Champasak Province, with official approval, although the land the group owned there was smaller than the minimum legal requirement. Several minority religious groups continued to state restrictions on land acquisition hindered building and renovating places of worship, although the LFND Religious Affairs Department stated it continued to emphasise that designated church structures should replace house churches whenever possible. The Seventh-day Adventist Church continued to attribute the large number of house churches to difficulties in obtaining enough land to meet Decree 315 requirements. Some religious leaders also stated they continued to experience lengthy delays in obtaining permits for church construction and generally received no response to requests. According to a church representative, the Catholic Church continued to seek government approval in its attempt to renovate a church building in Kaoyong Village, Chantabouly District, Vientiane Capital, pending since 2007. In 2020, government officials seized a former primary school building on the same property, which the government used as office space and temporary housing for Chinese construction workers building a new government high school funded by the government of China. The new high school was built on land that formerly belonged to the Catholic Church. In February, after completion construction, officials returned the primary school building to the church. When the high school opened in June the church agreed to cede an additional 1,000 square meters of land for parking, after receiving an additional request from the school through local officials. Officials also approved an application from church officials to renovate the church building, although upon formal inspection officials advised the structure needed full reconstruction, requiring an amendment to the land title to reflect changed boundaries, which was pending with the local government at year's end. In Bokeo Province, LEC, Seventh-day Adventist, and Catholic officials reported local officials denied requests to repair existing churches or build new ones, citing lack of adequate land holdings and insufficient members among the grounds for refusals. When some churches moved forward with repairs or renovations without approval, local authorities intervened to stop the work.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); hierarchy (not free; subject to preapproval by the government); monasticism (not free; restricted); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; restricted); pastoral services (not free; restricted); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; illegal); public expression and observance (not free; restricted); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (not free; restricted); religious literature (not free; restricted); religious and worship services (not free; subject to registration); religious trade (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the present system that abuses recognition and registration to censor the religious aspects of the lives of citizens and the internal affairs of religious organisations; the current restrictions for existential recognition are appreciated but should not be misused to exclude non-recognised religions; existential recognition should be extended to all belief systems; revoke the restriction tools identified in the registration system.



Latvia, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Latvia is a secular state; the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia is still given cultural recognition as the national church; Latvian law recognises Baptists, Catholics, Latvian Orthodox Christians, Lutherans, Methodists, Old Believers, Seventh-day Adventists and Jews as "traditional" religious groups and grants these groups rights and privileges not granted to other communities; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Protections: Implicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Human rights instruments: Latvia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Latvia did not vote on the UDHR; Latvia is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Latvian law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate in the country, it does reserve the right for religious groups to conduct activities in public places including parks and public squares, and the right to perform pastoral care in hospitals, prisons and the military to only registered religious organisations which in turn makes the policy mandatory in practice. Registration also accords religious groups the legal right to own property and conduct financial transactions, eligibility to apply for funds for religious building restoration, and tax deductions for donors. The law accords the same rights and privileges to the eight traditional religious groups, which it treats as already registered. The law stipulates fines ranging from €40 to €200 (\$44 to \$220) if an unregistered group carries out any activities reserved for registered organisations. The law states that the activities of a religious organisation may be terminated by a court ruling if the group acts in conflict with the constitution and other regulatory laws. Activities may also be terminated if a religious organisation calls on others to disobey the law or if its activities endanger the democratic state system, public peace and order, or the health and morals of others. The Law on Religious Organisations, amended in 2022, provides that the Enterprise Register of the Republic of Latvia may terminate the activities of a religious organisation if it cannot be reached at its legal address, does not submit the report on its activities as required by law, or fails to ensure the right of representation for the management bodies of the organisation. According to a law passed in 2022, the LOC – a self-governing Eastern Orthodox Church – is de jure independent from any church outside the country. By law, to register as a congregation, a religious group must have at least 20 members who are 18 or older. Individuals with temporary residency status, such as asylum seekers and foreign diplomatic staff, may count as members for the purpose of registration only during the authorised period of their residency permits. To apply, religious groups must submit charters explaining their objectives and activities; a list of all group members (full name, identification number, and signature); the names of the persons who will represent the religious organisation; minutes of the meeting founding the group; confirmation that members voted on and approved the statutes; and a list of members of the audit committee (full name, identification number, and title). The audit committee is responsible for preparing financial reports on the group and ensuring it adheres to its statutes. The Enterprise Register determines whether to register a religious group as a congregation, in consultation with the Ministry of Justice. The Enterprise Register may deny an application if it deems registration would threaten human rights, the democratic structure of the state, or public safety, welfare, or morals. Groups denied registration may appeal the decision in court. Ten or more congregations with a total of at least 200 members of the same faith or denomination, each with permanent registration status, may form a religious association or church. Groups with religious association status or status as a private society or foundation may establish theological schools and monasteries. The law does not permit simultaneous registration of more than one religious association of a single faith or denomination or of more than one religious group with the same or similar name. According to the law, all traditional and registered religious organisations are required to submit an annual report to the MOJ by March 1 regarding their activities and goals. They must also provide other data, including congregation size, the number of clergy, the number of weddings and other ceremonies performed, and details of group governance and financial status. The law stipulates foreign missionaries may be issued residency permits, hold meetings, and proselytize only if a registered domestic religious group invites them to conduct such activities. Visa regulations require foreign religious workers to present letters of invitation, typically from a religious organization, and either an ordination certificate or evidence of religious education that corresponds to a local bachelor's degree in theology. Religious workers from the EU or the 27 Schengen Area countries do not require visas.

Recognition policy: the "traditional" religious groups recognised in law are given rights and privileges not given to other religious groups including the right to teach religion courses in public schools and the right to officiate at marriages without obtaining a civil marriage licence from the MOJ. These eight groups are also the only religious groups represented on the government's Ecclesiastical Council, an advisory body established by law and chaired by the Prime Minister that meets on an ad hoc basis to comment and provide recommendations on religious issues although their recommendations do not carry the force of law. The law also accords the rights and privileges that are tied into registration to the eight traditional religious groups without them having to undergo registration.

Key restriction tools imposed: broad grounds for the denial of registration could easily be misused against religious groups the government does not favour, informational requirements are excessive (namely stipulating a list of all group members and their personal details among other excessive requirements), membership quota, nominal restriction, the establishment of pastoral services and marriage officiation as registration benefits makes registration procedures pseudo-mandatory, vertical recognition is in effect as some "traditional religions" are recognised while others are not (verticalism). During the year, the Enterprise Register terminated the activity of seven religious organizations – three Lutheran, two evangelical, one Pentecostal, and one Muslim – for failure to submit required reports on their activities after multiple requests. The organizations had the right to appeal the decision, but none had done so by the end of the year. During the year, the Enterprise Register approved the registration application of four religious groups, a Pentecostal congregation, an evangelical Christian congregation, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and the friars of the Discalced Carmelites (under the Catholic Church).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Re-establish the recognition system so that it is inclusive of all belief systems; revoke all restriction tools within the system identified in the above analysis; to become Dynamic, the government would need to establish a recognition agency to manage the recognition system, after which it would relinquish its control to ensure the autonomy of the agency.

Lebanese Republic



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Lebanon is a secular state; the state recognises five Islamic denominations (including Shia, Sunni, Druze, Alawite, and Ismaili), twelve Christian denominations (Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Assyrian, Chaldean, Copt, evangelical Protestant, and Roman Catholic) and Judaism are recognised by the state; religious groups not recognised by the government include Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, several Protestant groups, and the Church of Jesus Christ; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2004.

Protections: Implicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2004.

Human rights instruments: Lebanon is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Lebanon voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – there are no formal procedures for legal registration prescribed in law but ‘official recognition’ can be granted by applying to the government. However, unrecognised religious groups cannot assemble publicly for worship services. To do so, a religious group must submit a statement of its doctrine and moral principles to the cabinet, which evaluates whether the group’s principles are in accordance with the government’s perception of popular values and the constitution. Alternatively, an unrecognized religious group may apply for recognition by seeking affiliation with another recognized religious group. In doing so, the unrecognized group does not gain recognition as a separate group but becomes an affiliate of the group through which it applies. This process has the same requirements as applying for recognition directly with the government. There are 18 officially recognized religious groups: five Muslim groups (Shia, Sunni, Druze, Alawite, and Ismaili), 12 Christian groups (Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Assyrian, Chaldean, Copt, evangelical Protestant, and Roman Catholic), and Jews. Religious groups not recognized by the government include Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, several Protestant groups, and the Church of Jesus Christ. Individuals from all of Lebanon’s 18 recognized religious communities are involved in Lebanon’s political life and government. Official recognition of a religious group allows baptisms and marriages it performs to receive government recognition and also conveys other benefits such as tax-exempt status and the right to apply the group’s codes to personal status matters. By law, the government permits recognized religious groups to administer their own rules on family and personal status issues, including marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. State-appointed, government-subsidised sectarian courts administer family and personal status law for Shia, Sunni, Druze, and recognized Christian groups, according to the respective religious group’s beliefs. While the religious courts and religious laws are legally bound to comply with the provisions of the constitution, the Court of Cassation (the highest civil court in the judicial system) has very limited oversight of religious court proceedings and decisions. Unrecognized religious groups may own property, assemble for worship, and perform religious rites freely. They may not perform legally recognized marriages or divorces, and they have no standing to determine inheritance issues. Due to agreements in the country’s confessional system that designate percentages of senior government positions (and in some cases, specific positions) for the recognized religious communities, members of unrecognized groups have no opportunity to occupy certain government positions, including cabinet, parliamentary, secretary-general, and director general positions. The government requires Protestant churches to register with the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon, a self-governing advisory group that oversees religious matters for Protestant congregations and represents those churches to the government. The government issues foreign religious workers a one-month visa; to stay longer, a worker must complete a residency application during the month. Religious workers also must sign a “commitment of responsibility” form before receiving a visa, which subjects the worker to legal prosecution and immediate deportation for any activity involving religious or other criticism directed against the state or any other country, except Israel. If the government finds an individual engaging in religious activity while on a tourist visa, the government may determine a violation of the visa category has occurred and deport the individual.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation in favour recognition rather than legal registration as is the general form of amalgamation, informational requirements set out for recognition procedures are ambiguous and vulnerable to misuse against groups unfavoured by the state, there are several religious groups that the government does not or has refused to recognise; the issue of quasi-registration is ongoing. According to local NGOs, some members of unregistered religious groups, such as Baha'is and members of unrecognized Protestant faiths, continued to list themselves as belonging to recognized religious groups in government records to ensure their marriage and other personal status documents remained legally valid. Many Baha'is said they chose to list themselves as Shia Muslims in order to effectively manage civil matters that Shia institutions officially administered, while members of the Church of Jesus Christ said they registered as evangelical Protestants. The government again failed to approve a request from the Jewish community to change its official name to the Jewish Community Council from the Israelite Communal Council (the group’s officially recognized name). Jewish community representatives reported that the MOI continued to delay the verification of the results of the Jewish Community Council’s election of members, which occurs every six years, most recently in 2020. Regulations governing such councils require the MOI to verify council election results. The council, which represents the interests of the country’s Jewish citizens, repeatedly submitted requests to change its government-appointed name to reduce social stigma, but to no avail. The council blamed its official name in part for the difficulties it experienced with renewals every six years. In late 2021, the Minister of Interior said the MOI would investigate allegations that several council members forged the signatures of nonresident Lebanese Jews to illegally acquire property. As of year’s end, the MOI had not referred the case to the judiciary. The Jewish community faced difficulties importing material for religious rites; as customs agents were reportedly wary of allowing imports of any origin containing Hebrew script due to a national ban on trade of Israeli goods, the Jewish Community Council decided to stop importing any religious material. During the year, the Jewish Community Council faced difficulty in renewing the mandate of its members, a legal requirement for groups that wish to continue to be recognized by the government. This was due to government officials’ unwillingness to put their signatures on any document with the group’s name on it, since doing so could be misinterpreted as tacit support for Israel.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hieronymy** (free; a broad interpretation of the prohibition on “items offensive to Muslim culture” could see non-Islamic religious materials being prohibited); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to recognition); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free; however, could be subject to prohibition if challenged by one of the recognised religious groups); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Re-establish the recognition system so that it is inclusive of all belief systems and is able to recognise in a multi-level capacity; revoke all the main restriction tools identified.

Lesotho, Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Lesotho is a secular state; Christianity is given a privileged position by the state; theism is affirmed in the monarchical oath and oath of allegiance.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2018.

Human rights instruments: Lesotho is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Lesotho did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – the law does not mandate that religious groups register with the government in order to operate legally in the country. By law, any group, religious or otherwise, may register as a legal entity with the government provided the entity has a constitution and a leadership committee. Most religious groups register, but there is no penalty for those that do not. Registration gives a group legal standing, formalises its structure under the law, and provides exemption from income tax. In the absence of registration, religious organisations may operate freely but without legal standing or any of the protections of registered organizations. The law requires religious marriages to be performed by clergy members, leaving adherents of religious traditions without a clergy, such as Baha'is, with civil marriage as their only option. The law also recognises marriage under Lesotho customary law based on Basotho cultural norms and practices.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, restricting access to non-Christian groups broadcasting as a means of propagation. According to The Post and Lesotho Times, in March, Minister of Local Government, Chieftainship, Home Affairs, and Police Lephema said a multistory building with a mosque overlooking the Prime Minister's office and residential compound constructed next to the mosque posed a security risk. Referring to Muslims, Lephema said, "Let's stop them and remind them that this is a Christian country." Lephema also stated that Muslims trafficked Lesotho citizens to fight as terrorists in hostile countries. Muslim religious leaders continued to say Muslims had no access to state-owned television religious programming opportunities available to Christian groups, which left them unable to propagate their religion through this medium.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieroncy** (free); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (free); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (free); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (free); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (free); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

To become Dynamic, establish a recognition agency independent of government that acts to manage the established recognition system, to ensure its inclusivity, and to encourage the diversity of belief.

Liberia, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.



Secularity: Liberia is officially a secular state; however, Christianity is privileged by the state; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1986 and in the oaths of office for high-level government officials.

Protections: Implicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1986.

Human rights instruments: Liberia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Liberia voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatory of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: discriminatory mandatory registration – Liberian law mandates that all religious or belief organisations must register with the government to operate legally in the country except for groups considered 'Indigenous' which are exempted from having to register because they are instead governed by customary law. To register, religious groups must submit their articles of incorporation and their organizations' statements of purpose. Local religious organizations register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and pay a one-time fee of 7,500 Liberian dollars (L\$) (\$40) to file their articles of incorporation and an annual fee of L\$3,500 (\$19) for registration. Foreign religious organizations pay L\$78,000 (\$410) for registration annually and a one-time fee of L\$96,000 (\$510) to file their articles of incorporation. Religious organizations also pay L\$1,500 to L\$2,000 (\$8 to \$11) to notarize articles of incorporation to be filed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and an additional L\$1,500 (\$8) to receive a registered copy of the articles. The Ministry of Finance and Development Planning issues proof of accreditation for the articles of incorporation. There is also an option of completing the same process at the Liberia Business Registry. Some religious organizations are eligible to register at the business entity level, in compliance with a government regulation. Registered religious organizations, including missionary programs, religious charities, and religious groups, receive income tax exemptions and duty-free privileges on goods brought into the country, privileges not afforded to unregistered groups. Registered groups may be sued as a single entity separately from any lawsuits brought against individual owners. The law requires high-level government officials to take an oath ending with the phrase, "So help me God" when assuming office. On those occasions, it is customary for Christians to kiss the Bible, and Muslims the Quran.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, imposition of a fee system for different kinds of religious organisations (local, foreign, "local and foreign") some of which exceed RoRB threshold, multiple charges of registration fee such as being charged for individual locations. Muslim religious leaders called for their adherents to remain calm despite campaign promises by some politicians to make the country a Christian state. Muslim religious leaders also urged their adherents not to vote for a candidate solely on the basis of pledges to mark Islamic observances as national holidays, if elected. In April, leader of the Liberia Restoration Party Allen Roosevelt Brown promised to "redeem" the country's Christian faith by returning the country to a Christian state using the "trenches of politics." While addressing reporters in Monrovia, Brown stated the country was established "on the fundamental pillar of faith," although it was made a secular state by the 1986 constitution. Grand Mufti of the Fatwa Council of Liberia Sheikh Sumaworo called for unity and restraint among Muslims during his Eid al-Fitr message in April amid calls for official recognition of Islamic holidays or for a return of the country to a Christian state. Sumaworo exhorted followers to denounce those who "sow seeds of disunity" among Muslims. The National Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is reported warming relations with the government and during the year, commenced preliminary exploratory talks with the Center for National Documents and Records Agency (CNDRA) to recognize and conduct Baha'i marriages. CNDRA had officers stationed at its central office to conduct weddings and award marriage certificates for Christians and Muslims and suggested stationing a Baha'i representative at the CNDRA to conduct weddings and process marriage certificates for Baha'is. Human rights organizations continued to call upon the government to intervene in and investigate cases of persons accused of witchcraft being injured or killed as the result of exorcisms and trials by ordeal.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish distinct procedures for existential recognition and legal registration and at multiple levels of activity; reduce financial requirements for registration to more appropriate prices in line with RoRB standards; to become Dynamic, the government would need to establish a recognition agency to manage the religious recognition system and then relinquish its control over the agency in order to ensure its independence from government involvement.

Libya, State of



2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

ForRB Claim: No claim is made.

Secularity: Islam is the state religion; sharia is the principle source of legislation; Christians and Jews are recognised by the state as religious minorities; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2012.

Protections: No protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2012.

Human rights instruments: Libya is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Libya did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: non-registration and malregistration.

Registration policy: non-registration – there are no mechanisms outlined by the government for the registration of non-Islamic religious groups as all non-Islamic groups are either restricted or prohibited.

Malregistration – multiple groups continued to vie for influence and territorial control in the country. The GNU exerted limited control outside Tripoli and relied heavily on hybrid armed actors to remain in power. LNA as a non-state actor effectively controlled territory in the east and south of the country. Armed groups, nominally under the authority of government institutions, were the main security actors across the country.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, Islamic practice is constricted to state-approved norms. The Government of National Unity (GNU) through the General Authority for Endowments and Islamic Affairs (GAEIA) administers mosques, supervises clerics, and has primary responsibility for ensuring all Islamic religious practices conform to state-approved Islamic norms. There is no law providing for individuals' right to choose or change their religion or study, discuss, or promulgate their religious beliefs. There is no civil law explicitly prohibiting conversion from Islam to another religion or prohibiting proselytizing; however, the criminal code effectively prohibits missionary activities or conversion, according to scholars and human rights advocates. It includes prohibitions against "instigating division" and insulting Islam or the Prophet Muhammad, charges that carry a maximum sentence of death. The criminal code prohibits the circulation of publications that aim to "change the fundamental principles of the constitution or the fundamental rules of the social structure," which authorities use to criminalize the circulation of non-Islamic religious materials and speech considered "offensive to Muslims." In 2022, the House of Representatives enacted an Anticybercrime Law that stipulates that the use of the internet and new technologies is lawful only if "public order and morality" are respected. The law allows authorities to block or remove digital content deemed offensive to Libyan culture and values without a court order in cases where "security requirements or urgency" or "public morality" are involved. The law also criminalizes the use of encrypted communications and provides the government with the authority to conduct targeted or mass surveillance of electronic communications. The law imposes substantial fines and up to 15 years in prison for publishers of digital content that "results in a violation of public order or public morals" and contains "ideas that undermine society's security, stability, and social peace." The National Information Security and Safety Authority, part of the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology, is responsible for administering the law domestically and extraterritorially "if their impact and consequences extend to Libya. Several religious institutions continued to compete for influence in the country. The GNU GAEIA continued to oversee the state's Islamic endowments and donations, appointed imams, and directed the Friday sermon in areas under GNU control. Madkhali Salafist cleric Mohamed al-Abbani has led the GNU GAEIA since 2018. A rival, eastern GAEIA exercised similar responsibilities for the east and south. Human rights activists and political analysts reported that the Friday sermon texts that religious authorities provided to imams often included political and social messages. The Tripoli-based ISA, a domestic security and intelligence service that falls under the authority of the PC but is aligned with GNU Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dabaiba, arrested numerous individuals during the year on charges including atheism, spreading atheist ideas, Christian proselytizing, and conversion from Islam to Christianity. In March and April 2023, the Tripoli-based ISA arrested at least eight individuals as part of an operation targeting Libyan Muslims alleged to have converted to Christianity and foreigners suspected of Christian proselytization. Media reported the arrested group included two foreign teachers and six Libyan Christian converts; the GNU deported the two foreign teachers in mid-April, according to press reports. The ISA charged the Libyans with circulating views aimed at altering fundamental constitutional principles or the fundamental structures of the social order, or at overthrowing the state; they faced the death penalty, according to media reports. In a statement about the arrests on its Facebook page, the ISA said it continued to work "day and night" to thwart attempts to "tamper with Islamic values" and that the government "is keen to monitor suspicious activities and appeals that threaten the Islamic identity of our society, including the crime of apostasy and incitement to it." Following the arrests, the ISA posted video "confessions" online. The "confessions," which rights groups alleged were obtained under duress, depicted detainees with their faces blurred discussing how they converted to Christianity and identifying some of the other Christian groups or individuals with whom they interacted. The video "confessions" and news of the arrests were widely shared on Libyan social media and in the press. Responding to news of the arrests, Dar al-Ifta released a statement calling on security and judicial officials to "impose a deterrent punishment" on those responsible for conversion, adding that "conversion to Christianity is clear apostasy." At year's end, some of the detainees remained in detention pending further action. In May, the GNU GAEIA established the Guardians of Virtue, with the stated purpose of protecting Islamic values and virtue in the country. According to the website Middle East Monitor, opponents of the decision compared the new initiative to a "secret police," while supporters pointed to their belief that Islam is under threat in the country. According to analysis by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "Sufis in particular have been targets of the Guardians of Virtue, and many Sufi leaders and followers have been imprisoned and prevented from giving sermons at mosques. The Guardians of Virtue have also been able to hunt down intellectuals and writers," accusing them of "apostasy, Christian proselytizing, atheism, and freemasonry." Members of some religious groups reported foreigners on their staffs had difficulties securing visas to enter or reside in the country, as did some foreign staff members of secular, international NGOs.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; illegal); **hierarcy** (not free; non-Islamic materials either entirely prohibited or heavily restricted); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; illegal); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; illegal); **religious literature** (not free; illegal); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the current apparatus for terminally restricting religious activity is essential before for improvements can be made to Libya's approach to religious freedom; dismantlement entails the fundamental reshaping of the government and whole society's approach to religion and belief in accepting one fundamental principle, that human beings have the valid right to choose and change their belief identity, to have no none, or to be open to exploring different belief systems.

Liechtenstein, Principality of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Roman Catholicism is the state denomination; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2011.

Protections: No protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2011 although there are criminal penalties for religious discrimination.

Human rights instruments: Liechtenstein is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Liechtenstein did not vote on the UDHR; Liechtenstein is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious or belief organisations do not need to register with the government in order to operate legally in the country. However, there is no separate law for registering religious groups, but religious groups other than the Catholic Church may organize themselves as associations, which the commercial registry administers and gives associations the rights of legal entities, such as owning property and entering into contracts. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church must register as associations to receive government funding for activities such as providing religious education in schools or offering language courses for foreigners. To register in the commercial registry as an association, a religious group must follow the same procedures as a nonreligious group: it must submit an official letter of application to the Office for Justice within the Ministry of Infrastructure and Justice that includes the organisation's name, purpose, board members, and head office location, as well as a memorandum of association based on local law, a trademark certification, and a copy of the organisation's statutes. All religious groups registered in the commercial registry are exempt from certain taxes. To receive residency permits, foreign religious workers must have completed theological studies, command a basic level of German, belong to a "nationally known" religious group (the law does not define "nationally known"), and be sponsored by a resident clergy member of the same religious group.

Recognition policy: by law the state provides 300,000 Swiss francs (CHF) (\$358,000) annually to the Catholic Church, and municipalities provide the Church with additional funds, which vary by municipality and include support for maintenance of buildings and grounds owned by the Church. Priests are employees of the municipalities. Financial support from the state and municipalities to other religious groups is not mandated by law but is provided on a discretionary basis on request.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, non-recognition for any non-Catholic religion or denomination, some informational requirements (such as a memorandum of association based on local law and a trademark certification) are excessive, restrictions and requirements of foreign missionaries are impermissible. In May, following two years of inaction on a proposed constitutional amendment to grant complete equality of religions and to formally separate religion and state, the government proposed a new law aimed at achieving broad equality of religious communities through state recognition. The Religious Communities Act has the stated aim of establishing equal legal treatment among religious communities by creating a process for state recognition based on newly established criteria. To be recognized, religious communities must have worked in Liechtenstein for more than 20 years, have a membership of at least 200 individuals, have a stable organisational structure with authorised bodies and written statutes, and respect the state legal order. The law would also establish a state contribution amount of 20,000 CHF (\$24,000) for any state-recognised religious community plus an additional 1,000 CHF (\$1,200) for every 100 members per the census and allow equal access to state-recorded personal data. Additionally, responsibility for religious and nondenominational education would shift from the religious authorities to school authorities. Parliament passed a similar law in 2012 but it never entered into force due to failed negotiations between the state and the Catholic Archdiocese of Vaduz. The press reported speculation that following the September retirement of Catholic Archbishop of Vaduz Wolfgang Haas, who had expressed vocal opposition to proposed reforms regarding the separation of church and state, that the church might change its stance. While the LHRA praised the bill in general, it criticized the measure for not advancing the separation of religion and state, establishing excessively strict state recognition requirements, and requiring taxpayers who do not belong to a religious group to subsidize those that do. At year's end, the proposed law completed a consultation period and was referred to the parliament. The government immigration and passport office continued to issue five-year residency permits to religious workers instead of visas. Religious workers from Schengen-area member countries did not require permits or visas.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish procedures for religious registration distinct from those established to register secular entities; establish a recognition system that has the capacity to both existentially recognise and legally register religious entities at multiple levels of activity; to become Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that is independent of government to manage the newly established recognition system and works to promote and sustain religious and belief freedom through spreading the message that diversity of belief identity is positive.

Lithuania, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.



Secularity: Lithuania is a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1940); Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformed, Greek Catholics, Jews, Karaite Jews, Old Believers, Roman Catholics, Russian Orthodox Christians, and Sunni Muslims are recognised in law as the "traditional" religious groups of Lithuania; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2019.

Human rights instruments: Lithuania is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Lithuania did not vote on the UDHR; Lithuania is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Lithuanian law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government in order to operate legally in the country. The law defines religious groups as in one of three categories – religious communities, religious associations (which comprise at least two religious communities under common leadership), and religious centers (which are higher governing bodies of religious associations). Religious groups may apply to the government for state registration, state recognition, or both. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) handles official registration of religious communities, associations, and centers. Groups wishing to register must submit an application and supporting documentation to the ministry, including bylaws describing their religious teachings and governance, minutes of the founding meeting, and a list of the founders, at least 15 of whom must be citizens. Upon approval of its application, a religious community, association, or center may register as a legal entity with the State Enterprise Center of Registers. Registration is voluntary for religious communities, associations, and centers affiliated with traditional religious groups and mandatory for nontraditional communities wishing to receive legal status. Registration of traditional religious communities, associations, and centers is free of charge, while nontraditional communities pay a fee of €32 (\$35). Traditional communities also have a simpler registration procedure and need to submit only an application, decisions of their governing body on the appointment of their leader, and their headquarters address. The MOJ may refuse to register a religious group if full data are not included in the application, the activities of the group violate human rights or public order, or a group with the same name has already registered. According to the MOJ, there are 1,129 traditional and 198 nontraditional religious communities, associations, and centers that are officially registered entities. For all religious groups, official registration is a prerequisite for opening a bank account, owning property, and acting in a legal or official capacity as a community. The law allows all registered religious groups to own property for use as prayer houses, homes, and other functions, and it permits construction of facilities necessary for religious activities. All registered groups are eligible for public funds from municipalities for cultural and social projects. There is compulsory military conscription for males between ages 19 and 26 and up to age 38 for those with higher education. Military service is for nine months. Clergy from registered groups are among those exempt from compulsory military service. In the event of a military conflict, clergy would be called to serve as chaplains. The law recognizes the right to conscientious objection to military service and provides for alternative service under military direction either in civilian institutions or, if the military deems it necessary, in a national defense institution. Unregistered religious communities have no legal status, but the constitution allows them to conduct worship services and seek new members. A specific governmental commission, the Interministerial Commission to Coordinate Activities of Governmental Institutions that Deal with Issues of Religious, Esoteric, and Spiritual Groups, coordinates investigations of religious groups if there is a concern a group's actions may be inconsistent with "principles that stress respect for human freedom of expression and freedom of religion." A series of laws governs restitution and compensation of seized religious property. Under these laws, registered religious communities had until 1997 to apply to the appropriate ministry or municipality for restitution or compensation of religious property that they owned before June 19, 1948, the date on which the former Soviet Union nationalised all religious buildings. The government reviews cases from registered religious groups filed by the 1997 deadline but does not accept new claims. Religious groups may appeal ministry-level or municipality decisions in court. Unregistered religious groups may not apply for restitution. In some cases, religious groups continued to use nationalised buildings after June 19, 1948. Religious groups had until the 2014 deadline to register with the MOJ previously nationalised religious property that was not officially registered under their name but which they owned before 1948 and continued to use during the Soviet period. The government completed its review process in 2014.

Recognition policy: the government discriminates between "traditional" and "non-traditional" religious groups by providing more benefits to the former than the latter. The constitution grants recognition to traditional religious groups and provides for recognition of other religious groups if their teachings and practices do not conflict with law or public morals. It states the status of religious groups shall be established by agreement or law and recognised religious groups shall be free to carry out their activities as long as they are not in conflict with the constitution or laws. Recognition entitles nontraditional religious groups to perform marriages recognized by the state in the same manner as marriages officiated by traditional religious groups and to provide religious instruction in public schools. Recognition also grants nontraditional religious groups eligibility for annual subsidies from the state budget and for certain social security and healthcare contributions by the state, as well as the right to broadcast religious services on national radio. Effective May 1, an amendment to the Law on Religious Communities and Societies requires that the Seimas determine whether to grant state recognition to a religious group within three months of receiving a positive recommendation from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). A religious community has the right to present its opinion on the recommendation to the Seimas. If the Seimas refuses to grant state recognition to a nontraditional religious community, it must draft a resolution stating the grounds, including the reasons why the religious community is believed to have insufficient support in society and why its teachings or practices are contrary to law and/or morality. If the Seimas does not grant state recognition, a religious community may reapply after two years. The law recognizes as traditional those religious groups able to trace back their presence in the country at least 300 years. The law lists nine traditional religious groups: Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Evangelical Reformed, Orthodox, Old Believer, Jewish, Sunni Muslim, and Karaite Jewish. Traditional religious groups may perform marriages that are state recognized, establish joint private/public schools, provide religious instruction in public schools, and receive annual government subsidies. Their highest-ranking leaders are eligible to apply for diplomatic passports, and they may provide chaplains for the military, social care institutions, hospitals, and prisons. The state provides social security and healthcare insurance contributions for clergy, religious workers, and members of monastic orders of the traditional religious groups. Traditional religious groups are also not required to pay social and health-insurance taxes for clergy and most other religious workers and members of monastic orders. Other religious groups and associations may apply to the MOJ for state recognition if they have legal entity status, meaning they have been officially registered in the country for at least 25 years. The Evangelical Baptist Union of Lithuania, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Pentecostal Evangelical Belief Christian Union, and New Apostolic Church of Lithuania are the only state-recognized nontraditional religious groups registered in this manner. The government uses the term "confession" to refer to one or more traditional religious communities grouped under a single faith. The government allocates funds to each of nine confessions for refurbishing houses of prayer, restoring old cemeteries, and preserving cultural heritage sites. Each of the nine confessions receives €3,075 (\$3,400) annually as a base fund, plus an additional amount apportioned according to the number of adherents in each community. The criminal code prohibits incitement of hatred and discrimination based on religion and stipulates fines or up to two years in prison for violations. The code penalizes interference with religious ceremonies of recognized religious groups, with community service, fines, or detention for up to 90 days. The law does not address interference with or incitement of hatred against unrecognized religious groups.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, broad grounds are provided for the denial of registration, dual registration, membership quota, longevity quotas, misuse of the dichotomous terms "traditional" and "non-traditional" to create a vertical recognition system (verticalism), nominal restriction, parliamentary vote (parliamentarianism). An application for religious association status by the United Methodist Church of Lithuania, which the MOJ submitted to the Seimas with a favorable recommendation in 2001, remained pending. On 19th September 2023, the Seimas rejected for the third time the application for state recognition of the Romuva, a religious association whose members practice an ancient Baltic pagan faith. The Seimas previously refused recognition in 2022 and 2019. The Romuva prevailed in their case before the ECHR (nonbinding on the country) in 2018. The Seimas, however, again refused state recognition, stating the group fosters ethnic culture but should not be viewed as a religion. In response, the Romuva requested the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to implement "enhanced supervision" of the ECHR decision, which is used for cases requiring urgent individual measures or revealing important structural problems. Deliberations continued at year's end.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the present restrictive recognition system involving the revocation of the restriction tools identified.

Luxembourg, Grand Duchy of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Luxembourg is a secular state; the government recognises and has formally approved conventions with the Anglican Church of Luxembourg, Greek Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, Russian Orthodox Church, Romanian Orthodox Church, Serbian Orthodox Church, the Muslim community, the Jewish community and as one community the Reformed Protestant Church of Luxembourg and the Protestant Church of Luxembourg.

Protections: No protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2009.

Human rights instruments: Luxembourg is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Luxembourg voted in favour of the UDHR; Luxembourg is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – there are no formal registration mechanisms for religious or belief organisations prescribed by the government. Religious groups are free to operate in the form they wish, with many choosing to operate as nonprofit associations.

Recognition policy: non-mandatory recognition – the government has formally approved conventions with six religious groups, which it supports financially with a fixed amount that is adjusted yearly for inflation. The six groups receive funds based partly on the number of their adherents in 2016; other funding is a direct contribution fixed under a revised law adopted in 2016. The six groups are the Roman Catholic Church; the Greek, Russian, Romanian, and Serbian Orthodox Churches as one community; the Anglican Church; the Reformed Protestant Church of Luxembourg and the Protestant Church of Luxembourg as one community; the Jewish community; and the Muslim community. To qualify for a convention with the state, a religious community must be a recognized world religion and have established an official and stable representative body with which the government can interact. Groups without signed conventions, such as the New Apostolic Church, operate freely but do not receive state funding. The Baha'i Faith does not have a convention with the state but has a foundation that allows it to receive tax-deductible donations. Government funding levels for the six religious groups are specified in each convention. By law, clergy of recognized religious groups hired in 2016 or earlier receive their salaries from the government and are grandfathered into the government-funded pension system. Religious groups receiving funds from the government must submit their accounts and the report of an auditor to the government for review to verify they have spent government funds in accordance with laws and regulations. The government may cancel funding to a religious community if it determines the community is not upholding any of the three mutually agreed principles of respect for human rights, national law, and public order stipulated in the conventions. According to the latest information from the Ministry of State in charge of religious affairs, of the six religious groups with conventions with the government, the Muslim community received €450,000 (\$497,000) and the Anglican community received €125,000 (\$138,000) during the year, the same amounts as received in 2022. The Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox communities together received a total of €25 million (\$27.6 million), the same amount as received in 2022. During the year, the Ministry of Higher Education provided €690,481 (\$763,000) to the LSRS, to promote, among other objectives, research, education, and collaboration with the six religious groups that have signed agreements with the state.

Key restriction tools imposed: grounds for the revocation of a bilateral cooperation agreement are broad and vulnerable to misuse, qualifications for establishing a bilateral cooperation agreement such as the group must be a "recognised world religion" are ambiguous and exclude new religious movements, unstructure is a problem which is epitomised by the lack of registration procedures. The government continued to decline to create a legislative framework for formal recognition of religious groups, stating it did not have the authority and competence necessary to define religion and that codifying such a definition would impede religious freedom. As a result, religious groups without a convention with the government continued to operate as nonprofit organisations. Religious minority groups, including the New Apostolic Church, again stated the government's continued failure to create a legislative framework discriminated against groups that did not have a convention with the government. The government stated the aim of having conventions was to create a transparent funding mechanism and that the conventions were not tools for the state to legally recognize religions.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierony** (free); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (free); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (free); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (free); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (free); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Dismantle the misuse of existential recognition to exclude non-recognised groups; revoke subjective legislation; minor issues within the system persist that require resolutions; to become Dynamic, the government would need to establish a recognition agency that would manage the recognition system and also take over the responsibility of funding groups; the government would need to relinquish its control over the recognition agency to ensure its independence.

Madagascar, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Madagascar is a secular state; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2010.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2010.

Human rights instruments: Madagascar is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Madagascar did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Madagascan law mandates that all religious or belief organisations register with the Ministry of the Interior in order to operate legally in the country. By registering, a religious group attains the legal status necessary to receive direct bequests and other donations. Once registered, the group may apply for a tax exemption each time it receives a donation, including from abroad. Registered religious groups also have the right to acquire land from individuals to build places of worship; however, the law states landowners should first cede the land back to the state, after which the state will then transfer it to the religious group. To qualify for registration, a group must have at least 100 members and an elected administrative council of no more than nine members, all of whom must be citizens. Groups failing to meet registration requirements may instead register as “simple associations.” Simple associations may not receive tax-free donations but may hold religious services as well as conduct various types of community and social projects. Associations engaging in dangerous or destabilising activities may be disbanded or have their registration withdrawn. Simple associations must apply for a tax exemption each time they receive a donation from abroad. If an association has foreign leadership and/or members of the board, it may form an association “reputed to be foreign.” An association is reputed to be foreign only if the leader or members of the board include foreign nationals. Such associations may only obtain temporary authorisations, subject to periodic renewal and other conditions. The law does not prohibit national associations from having foreign nationals as members. The government requires a permit for all public demonstrations, including religious events such as outdoor worship services.

Key restriction tools imposed: all leaders of a registrant religious group must be Madagascan citizens to succeed in applying through the main registration procedure as a religious group, amalgamation of recognition and registration procedures in favour of legal registration, broad grounds for deregistration are likely to be misused to the detriment of groups unfavoured by the state, GFOs are given separate registration procedures and only “temporary authorisations” to operate in the country, membership quota of 100. Muslims born in the country continued to report that despite generations of residence, some members of their community were unable to acquire citizenship. Muslim leaders again reported that some Muslims continued to encounter difficulty obtaining official documents and services from government offices because of their non-Malagasy-sounding names. Leadership disputes within the evangelical group Jesosy Mamonjy remained unresolved this year. In September, a group of pastors within the church told the press that regional-level government authorities continued to interfere in its internal affairs by supporting a board elected in 2022 that most church members did not recognize. They said that local authorities supported the board’s decisions to replace local pastors and would sometimes overrule parishioners if they contested the new pastors, sometimes providing armed security to new pastors when they thought church members might protest. The Jesosy Mamonjy pastors said they believed a member of parliament representing a former president’s opposition political party was influencing ministry authorities and preventing a thorough investigation by the Ministry of the Interior into the board elected in 2022. Religious groups stated the government did not always enforce registration requirements and did not deny requests for church registration. All the large religious groups were registered. As of mid-November (the most recent information available), the Ministry of Interior reported 400 officially registered religious groups, compared with 399 at the end of 2022. Between January and November 2023, the ministry registered six new religious groups and did not deny any requests for registration. In September, the government granted official recognition to three religious groups as churches: the New Protestant Church of Madagascar, the Orthodox Church of Madagascar, and the Baptist Church of Madagascar. According to the Ministry of the Interior, the designation of “church” conferred the benefit of determining the Church’s internal policies and structure without needing to abide by the conditions listed in the legal framework for religious groups, allowing them to freely apply their own regulations. The government acknowledged that some registered groups may have become inactive or dissolved without informing the government. State-run Malagasy National Television continued to provide free broadcasting to Seventh-day Adventists, Lutherans, Anglicans, and Presbyterians from Mondays to Thursdays, to Catholics on Mondays, and to the Muslim community on Fridays. During Ramadan, it provided additional broadcast time to the Muslim community to issue the call to prayer. Members of the Federation of Evangelical Churches continued to receive free airtime to broadcast religious services every morning on public television. State-run Malagasy National Radio continued to provide free broadcasting only to the four members of the Council of Christian Churches (Catholics, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Anglicans) every Sunday. Leaders of the Apokalipsy Church said that the government had denied their request for free airtime on national radio and television channels, however the government permitted the church to operate several private radio and television channels without restriction.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierony** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish provisions for existential recognition; revoke existent restrictive policies in the recognition system and remove all forms of discrimination in registration process as well as all restriction tools identified; to be classified Dynamic, the government would need to establish a recognition agency to manage its recognition system; following its establishment and the appointment of a board of directors, the government would need to relinquish its involvement in the agency.

Malawi, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Malawi is a secular state; theism is affirmed in the presidential oath.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2017.

Human rights instruments: Malawi is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Malawi did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious or belief organisations are not required by law to register with the government in order to begin operations legally in Malawi. However, religious or belief organisations are required to register with the government to gain personality in law. To do so, groups must submit documentation detailing the structure and mission of their organization and pay a fee of 1,000 kwacha (less than \$1). The government reviews applications for administrative compliance only. According to the government, registration does not constitute endorsement of religious beliefs, nor is it a prerequisite for religious activities. Registration allows a religious group to acquire land, rent property in its own name, and obtain utility services such as water and electricity. The law authorises religious groups, regardless of registration status, to import certain goods duty free. These include items for religious use, vehicles used for worship-related purposes, and office equipment. In practice, however, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs rarely grants duty exemptions. Detainees have a right to consult with a religious counselor of their choice. Foreign missionaries are required to have employment permits.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation of recognition and registration procedures in favour of legal registration.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieroncy** (free); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (free); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (free); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (not free; renting property is subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (free); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Establish provisions for existential recognition and fix instances of unstructure within the present system; to be classified Dynamic, the government would need to establish a recognition agency to manage its recognition system; following its establishment and the appointment of a board of directors, the government would need to relinquish its involvement in the agency.



Malaysia

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

FoRB Claim: Partial claim constrained to sharia-compliance.

Secularity: Sunni Islam is the state denomination.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2007 except as expressly authorised by the constitution.

Human rights instruments: Malaysia is party to the UNCRC and the UNDRIP; Malaysia is neither party to the ICCPR nor the ICESCR; Malaysia did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.



Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – there is no legal requirement for non-Muslim religious groups to register, but to become approved ‘nonprofit charitable organizations’, all groups must register with the government’s Registrar of Societies (ROS) by submitting paperwork showing the organisation’s leadership, purpose, and rules, and by paying a small fee. These organizations are legally required to submit annual reports to the ROS to remain registered. The ROS may inspect registered organizations and investigate those suspected of being used for purposes “prejudicial to public peace, welfare, good order, or morality.” Tax laws allow an exemption for registered religious groups for donations received and a tax deduction for individual donors. Donors giving zakat (Islamic tithes) to Muslim religious organizations receive a tax rebate. Donors to government-approved charitable organizations (including some non-Muslim religious groups) may receive a tax deduction on the contribution rather than a tax rebate. The law forbids proselytizing of Muslims by non-Muslims, with punishments varying from state to state, including imprisonment and caning. The law allows Muslims to proselytise without restriction. State governments have exclusive authority over allocation of land for, and the construction of, all places of worship as well as land allocation for all cemeteries. All Islamic houses of worship – including mosques and prayer rooms – fall under the authority of the Department of Development of Islam (JAKIM) and corresponding state Islamic departments; officials at these departments must first authorise the construction of any mosque or prayer room. Foreign missionaries and international students enrolling in religious courses must apply for entry with the Department of Immigration. These classes of visas are valid for one year, and a national body representing the respective faiths must endorse the applicant’s qualifications.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation of recognition and registration procedures in favour of legal registration, grounds for group investigation are ambiguous and are vulnerable to being misused against groups unfavoured by the state, non-recognition for any non-Islamic group, registration fee is undisclosed, the state allocates land for building places of worship but this policy could easily be misused against groups unfavoured by the state. Muslims who seek to convert to another religion must first obtain approval from a sharia court to declare themselves as “apostates.” Sharia courts seldom grant such requests, especially for those born Muslim and ethnic Malays, and those who have converted to Islam. Penalties for apostasy vary by state. In the states of Perak, Melaka, Sabah, and Pahang, apostasy is a criminal offense punishable by a fine or prison term. In Pahang, courts may also impose up to six strokes of the cane for apostasy. The maximum penalty for apostasy in the states of Kelantan and Terengganu is death, but courts have never imposed this penalty, and its legality remains untested. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) report that most converts from Islam prefer to do so privately, without legal approval. Nationally, civil courts generally cede authority to sharia courts in cases concerning conversion from Islam. In some states, sharia courts allow one parent to convert children to Islam without the consent of the second parent. The law does not restrict the rights of non-Muslims to change their religious beliefs and affiliation. A non-Muslim wishing to marry a Muslim must convert to Islam for the sharia court to officially recognize the marriage. JAKIM and state Islamic authorities prepare all Friday sermons for congregations as well as oversee and approve the appointment of imams at all mosques. JAKIM and state Islamic officials must formally approve all teachers of Islam before they may preach or lecture on Islam in public. Sharia courts have jurisdiction over Muslims in matters of family law and religious observances. Non-Muslims have no standing in sharia proceedings, leading to some cases where sharia court rulings have negatively affected non-Muslims who are unable to defend their position or appeal the court’s decision. Such rulings typically occurred in cases related to custody, divorce, inheritance, burial, and conversion in interfaith families. The relationship between sharia and civil law remains largely unresolved in the legal system. National identity cards specify religious affiliation, and the government uses them to determine which citizens are subject to sharia. The cards identify Muslims in print on the face of the card; for members of other recognized religions, religious affiliation is encrypted in a smart chip within the identity card. Married Muslims must carry a special photo identification of themselves and their spouse as proof of marriage. JAKIM coordinates the Hajj, endowment (waqf), tithes, and other Islamic activities. The Film Censorship Guidelines published by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) identifies several criteria that “warrant attention” by the ministry, including scenes that depict lifestyles that are outside of “cultural norms and religious standards.”

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarcy** (not free; non-Islamic religious materials are restricted from importation); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; illegal to proselytise Muslims); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the powers of the JAKIM to control the practice of Islam in the country is paramount; this should be combined with a dismantlement of the present Censorious apparatus of legislation and procedures restricting religious activity and the process of registration.

Maldives, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

ForB Claim: No claim is made.

Secularity: Sunni Islam is the state denomination; theism is affirmed in the oaths of office; the president, all judges, ministers and all other public office holders must be Sunni Muslims.

Protections: No protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2008. Although the constitution contains a provision prohibiting discrimination “of any kind,” it does not list religion as a prohibited basis for discrimination.

Human rights instruments: Maldives is party to the ICCPR (but with a reservation on Article 18 that the government’s application of Article 18 principles shall be “without prejudice to the Constitution of the Republic”), the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Maldives did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: non-registration.

Registration policy: non-registration – there are no provisions set out in Maldivian law for any non-Islamic religious or belief organisations to gain legal personality.

Key restriction tools imposed: Islamic preaching and proselytizing that is unapproved by the state is prohibited as is all non-Islamic proselytism, non-recognition and non-registration for any religion or denomination other than Sunni Islam, obtaining a licence for an imam necessitates receiving a degree in religious studies from the government-approved university, state supervision of sermons delivered by imams. The law prohibits the conversion of a Muslim to another religion. By law, a violation may result in the loss of the convert’s citizenship, although a judge may impose a harsher punishment per sharia jurisprudence. Although the law does not stipulate such punishment, sharia jurisprudence is often understood by the public and religious scholars to provide for the death penalty in cases of conversion from Islam (i.e., apostasy), but the government has made no such statement. By law, no one may deliver sermons or explain religious principles in public without obtaining a license from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs (MIA). Imams may not prepare Friday sermons without government authorisation. To obtain a license to preach, the law specifies an individual must be a Sunni Muslim, have a degree in religious studies from a university recognized by the government, and not have been convicted of a crime in sharia court. The law also sets educational standards for imams to ensure they have theological qualifications the government considers adequate. Government regulations stipulate the requirements for preaching and contain general principles for the delivery of religious sermons. The regulations prohibit making statements in sermons that may be interpreted as racial or gender discrimination, discouraging access to education or health services in the name of Islam, or demeaning the character of and/or creating hatred toward persons of any other religion. The law provides for a punishment of two to five years in prison or house arrest for violations of these provisions. Anyone who assists in such a violation is subject to imprisonment or house arrest for two to four years and a fine of 5,000 to 20,000 rufiyaa (\$325 to \$1,300). The law requires that foreign scholars, imams and preachers ensure their sermons conform to the country’s norms, traditions, culture, and social etiquette. Propagation of any religion other than Islam is a criminal offense, punishable by two to five years in prison or house arrest. Proselytizing to change denominations within Islam is also illegal and carries the same penalty. If the offender is a foreigner, authorities may revoke the individual’s license to preach in the country (if the individual has one) and deport the person. By law, mosques and prayer houses are under the control of the MIA. The law prohibits the establishment of places of worship for non-Islamic religious groups. The law states, “Non-Muslims living in or visiting the country are prohibited from openly expressing their religious beliefs, holding public congregations to conduct religious activities, or involving Maldivians in such activities.” By law, those expressing religious beliefs other than Islam face imprisonment or house arrest of up to five years, fines ranging from 5,000 to 20,000 rufiyaa (\$325 to \$1,300), and deportation. By law, a female citizen may not marry a non-Muslim foreigner unless he first converts to Islam. A male citizen may marry a non-Muslim foreigner if the foreigner is Christian or Jewish; other foreigners must convert to Islam prior to marriage. The law prohibits importation of any items the MIA deems contrary to Islam, including religious literature, religious statues, alcohol, pork products, and pornographic materials. Penalties for contravention of the law range from imprisonment for three months to three years. It is against the law to offer alcohol to a citizen, although government regulations permit the sale of alcoholic beverages to foreigners on resort islands. Individuals must request permission from the Ministry of Economic Development to import restricted goods. The MPS reported they closed without action the investigation launched in 2019 against employees of the NGO Maldivian Democracy Network, which was deregistered in 2019 because the group’s 2015 Preliminary Report on Radicalization in Maldives contained content that mocked Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, according to the MPS and the Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Community Empowerment. The Communications Authority of Maldives (CAM) continued to maintain an unpublished blacklist of websites containing material it deemed un-Islamic or anti-Islamic. According to the government, CAM did not proactively monitor internet content but instead relied on requests from ministries and other government agencies to block websites violating laws against criticism or defamation of Islam. As of year’s end, the MPS reported continuing three investigations launched in 2022, into “online posts for publishing un-Islamic content or violating Islamic tenets.”

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; illegal and loss of citizenship for those who attempt to convert away from Islam); **hierarcy** (not free; non-Islamic religious materials are prohibited from importation); **monasticism** (not free; non-Islamic monasticism illegal); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **proselytism** (not free; illegal to proselytise Muslims); **public expression and observance** (not free; non-Islamic expression illegal); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; non-Islamic literature illegal); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the present recognition system must take place in order to resume any semblance of religious freedom in the country; this would involve the revocation of all legislation restricting religious activity and the disestablishment of Sunni Islam as the state religion if freedom of religion or belief according to international law is not securable without intervention from sharia law; a new recognition system should be established in order to ensure the provision of both existential recognition and legal registration for all belief systems and across all levels of activity.

Mali, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Mali is a secular state and the transitional government is largely upholding this principle in practice; theism is affirmed in the presidential oath.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2023.

Human rights instruments: Mali is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Mali did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatory registration: mandatory and malregistration.



Registration policy: discriminatory quasi-mandatory registration – although the law states that all public associations, including all religious groups, except for groups practicing indigenous beliefs (such as animism), must register with the government, no penalties are prescribed for remaining unregistered. Registration also confers no tax preferences or other legal benefits. To register, applicants must submit copies of a declaration of intent to create an association, notarised copies of bylaws, copies of policies and regulations, notarised copies of a report of the first meeting of the association's general assembly, and lists of the leaders of the association, with signature samples of three of the leaders. Upon review, if approved, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MATD) grants the certificate of registration. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, Worship, and Customs (MARCC) is responsible for administering the national strategy for countering violent extremism, promoting religious tolerance, and coordinating national religious activities such as pilgrimages and religious holidays for followers of all religions. The law defines marriage as secular. Couples who seek legal recognition must have a civil ceremony, which they may follow with a religious ceremony. A man may choose between a monogamous or polygamous marriage. The religious customs of the deceased determine inheritance rights, and civil courts consider these customs when they adjudicate such cases; however, many cases are settled informally. The 147-member National Transition Council (CNT), the country's transition legislative body, included four seats reserved for representatives of three religious associations. One seat is held by a Catholic, one by a Muslim, and two by Protestants. In 2022, the HCI objected to the CNT's decision to reserve a second seat for a Protestant member without also allocating an additional seat for a Muslim member.

Malregistration – the ongoing war in Mali and the insurgency of Islamist militants in rural areas means the central government does not have the full capacity to enforce its registration laws and protect registered religious or belief organisations throughout the territory it claims.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, non-beneficial registration, signature quota (three leaders of the registrant group). On August 31, authorities sentenced Adama Fomba, also known as Bahfa, an adherent of Kemetism, to five years in prison for an offense of a religious nature. Authorities arrested Fomba in 2022 after a video circulated on social media allegedly showing him insulting Islam. In September, Fomba appealed his sentence. At year's end, the case remained pending at the Bamako Court of Appeals. The prosecutor responsible for cybercrime cases released a statement on August 10 warning against hate speech on social media critical of other religions. In February, a Bamako court sentenced the national leader of Kemetism, Fakoly Doumbia, to one year in prison with eight months suspended, for "offences of a religious nature capable of causing disturbance to public order." Doumbia and five others were detained in 2022 after Doumbia criticized MARCC Minister Mahamadou Kone for condemning a video on social media showing Mamadou Dembele, an adherent of Kemetism, stepping on a Quran. In July, the transition government adopted a new constitution, replacing the constitution that had been in effect since 1992. The new constitution continued to prohibit religious discrimination under the law. The draft law on religion that the Council of Ministers adopted in 2021 remained pending with the Transition President's Office at year's end. The proposed law would enable MARCC to more easily oversee religious organizations by giving it a primary role in approving their registration applications, replacing the existing system under which the MATD alone manages the registration process and review. During the year, MARCC renewed a training program for imams on preaching what it described as moderate interpretations of Islam with the Moroccan government. MARCC signed the agreement in 2022 to train 300 imams over five years. According to the ministry, the governments of Egypt and Saudi Arabia also offered to train imams. In January, in collaboration with the HCI and representatives from the Catholic and Protestant churches, MARCC published guidelines for sermons to combat violent extremism. MARCC developed the guidelines using the results of a 2020 study of factors influencing extremism related to religion. The UN Development Program assisted with the study.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that possesses provisions for both existential recognition and legal registration for all belief systems and at multiple levels of activity; revoke signature quota and non-beneficial registration policy.

Malta, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: **Receptive**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: **Roman Catholic Church is the state denomination; theism is affirmed in the presidential oath and the oath of allegiance.**

Protections: **Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “creed” was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.**

Human rights instruments: Malta is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Malta did not vote on the UDHR; Malta is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: unconditional registration – religious or belief organisations are not required by law to register to operate legally in the country and tax exemptions are available to non-registered religious or belief groups. Religious groups may own property, including buildings. Groups using property for a particular purpose, including religious worship, must obtain a permit for that purpose from the Planning Authority. All religious groups may organize and run private religious schools, and their clergy may perform legally recognized marriages and other religious functions.

Recognition policy: the constitution states the Catholic Church has “the duty and the right to teach which principles are right and which are wrong.” The constitution and law make Catholic education compulsory in public schools. The state, rather than the Catholic Church, provides teachers (who may be non-Catholic) for the courses. Students, with parental consent if the student is younger than age 16, may opt out of these classes and instead take an ethics course, if one is available. If a school does not offer an ethics course, students may still opt out of the religion class.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation of recognition and registration procedures in favour of the latter, mandatory indirect registration, non-response and delay to applications (one such application has been pending since 2017).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish distinct provisions for existential recognition in the country and multi-level recognition is advisable; to become Dynamic, the Maltese government would need to establish a recognition agency to manage the aforementioned recognition system but should relinquish its control of such an agency upon its establishment in order to ensure the agency’s independence from government; existential recognition provided to all belief systems and at multiple levels along with fixing some of the minor issues in the present system identified herein should see Malta ascend to Dynamic classification.



Marshall Islands, Republic of the



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Marshall Islands is a secular state; however, there some instances of preference for Christianity such as the custom to begin government functions with a Christian prayer; theism is affirmed in the constitution.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1995.

Human rights instruments: Marshall Islands is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Marshall Islands was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Marshall Islands did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – the law in the Marshall Islands allow for non-registered religious or belief organisations to operate legally. However, if religious or belief organisations do register then they can qualify for tax exemptions. Religious or belief organisations register under either secular designations 'nonprofit corporation' or a 'cooperative.' The law states the tax on gross revenue shall not be applied to "corporations, associations, or societies organised and operated exclusively for religious, charitable, scientific, or educational purposes." In addition, goods imported into the country by "churches for their own religious, educational, or charitable purposes" are exempt from import duty.

Recognition policy: governmental functions, by continuing custom, usually began and ended with an ordained minister from the United Church of Christ or other church official delivering a Christian prayer. Some smaller Christian denominations noted that they were rarely asked to lead prayers at official functions. While there was no religious education in public schools, most extracurricular school events began and ended with an interdenominational Christian prayer delivered by a minister. According to local residents, such prayers before and after public events were a longstanding cultural practice and part of the widely accepted tradition of the country.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation of recognition and registration procedures in favour of the latter.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish provisions for existential recognition distinct from that of legal registration in order to become receptive; in order to become Dynamic, the Marshallese government would need to establish a recognition agency to manage the aforementioned recognition system but should relinquish its control of such an agency upon its establishment in order to ensure the agency's independence from government.

Mauritania, Islamic Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

ForRB Claim: No claim is made.

Secularity: Sunni Islam is the state denomination; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2012 and is affirmed in oaths of office; the president must be a Muslim.

Protections: No protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2012.

Human rights instruments: Mauritania is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Mauritania was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Mauritania did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: discriminatory-mandatory registration – the Mauritanian government registers non-Islamic religious NGOs rather than as religious or belief organisations while Islamic groups do not need to register. The law allows for non-Muslim religious groups to register and operate by applying through both the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Traditional Education (MIATE), although there were no such groups registered as of year's end. Proselytizing by non-Muslim religious groups is prohibited. The law sets out a declarative system in which NGOs are automatically granted authorisation to operate 60 days after they submit their registration to authorities. Faith-based NGOs must also agree to refrain from proselytizing (prohibited for non-Muslim groups under the law) or otherwise promoting any religion other than Islam. The law requires the MOI to authorise in advance all group meetings, including non-Islamic religious gatherings and those held in private homes. As of 31 December 2023, 5,858 NGOs had registered under the NGO law that went into effect in 2021. The law made it easier for NGOs, including faith-based organizations, to register and operate in the country.

Recognition policy: the constitution defines the country as an Islamic republic and recognises Islam as the sole religion of its citizenry and the state. The law requires members of the Constitutional Council and the High Council of Magistrates to take an oath of office that includes a promise to God to uphold the law of the land in conformity with Islamic precepts.

Key restriction tools imposed: all public gatherings, including those for religious purposes, must be authorised in advance by the Ministry of Interior (MOI), it remains illegal for non-Islamic religious groups to proselytise or convert citizens and to express their religion publicly, non-recognition for any non-Sunni religion or denomination, illegal to print and distribute non-Islamic religious materials. By law, the MIATE is responsible for enacting and disseminating fatwas, fighting "extremism," promoting research in Islamic studies, organizing the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages, and monitoring mosques. The government also appoints the High Council for Fatwa and Administrative Appeals, which advises the government on conformity of legislation to Islamic precepts and has sole authority to regulate fatwa issuance and resolve related disputes among citizens and between citizens and public agencies. On April 25, police near the town of Rosso on the border with Senegal detained a citizen of Mauritania after his son was found bringing Bibles and Christian learning materials from Senegal into Mauritania. To protect his son, the father reportedly claimed that the Bibles and other materials belonged to him. A local investigative judge in Rosso noted his intent to charge the father with tartuffery (concealing atheism or apostasy from Islam, while pretending to be a Muslim) – a charge that carries an automatic death sentence for those convicted. In July, however, the Minister of Justice authorised the father's release and dropped all charges in the case. On November 30, police arrested Mauritanian pastor Adama Diallo after a video of him performing a baptism went viral and sparked what was described as community outrage. Over the following week police arrested an additional 25 Christians from the congregation in Selibaby. According to sources, some police and community members exhibited what they described as a lack of understanding of Christian rituals and dismissed them as unwelcome in Mauritania. A group of officials investigated the situation and attempted to pressure the Christians to reconvert to Islam. While the detainees refused to reconvert to Islam, they ultimately agreed to sign a statement that they believed in God in order to be released. Officials warned the Christians that they were in a Muslim country with laws prohibiting the open practice of faiths other than Islam. The possession of non-Islamic religious materials remained legal, although the government continued to prohibit their printing and distribution. The government maintained a Quranic television channel and radio station. Both stations sponsored regular programming on themes of moderation in Islam. The government continued to forbid non-Muslims from proselytizing, although there was no specific legal prohibition. The government continued to ban any public expression of religion except that of Islam. Authorised churches were able to conduct services within their premises but could not proselytize. An unofficial government requirement restricted non-Islamic worship to the few recognized Christian churches. There were Roman Catholic and other Christian churches in Nouakchott, Kaedi, Atar, Nouadhibou, and Rosso. Non-Islamic religious services remained open only to foreigners, and citizens could not attend. Some Christian groups seeking to establish churches in the country, particularly from the local Protestant community, were unable to obtain authorization from authorities. Because of a lack of authorisation, some churches could not open a bank account in their name. Non-Muslim religious leaders, however, stated the government typically did not prevent such groups from holding religious gatherings as long as they were held "discretely" and in private spaces. Established churches sometimes faced difficulties importing religious materials for use during church services (i.e., Bibles, religious education books, and wafers and wine for communion). Several registered international Christian NGOs reported, however, that they continued to operate successfully in the country.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; illegal and loss of citizenship for those who attempt to convert away from Islam); **hierarcy** (not free; non-Islamic religious materials are prohibited from importation); **monasticism** (not free; non-Islamic monasticism illegal); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **proselytism** (not free; illegal to proselytise Muslims and citizens that engage in non-Islamic proselytism will lose their citizenship); **public expression and observance** (not free; non-Islamic expression illegal); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; non-Islamic literature illegal); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the current system is the necessary precursor to attaining any kind of semblance of religious freedom; repeal laws criminalising conversion from Islam and proselytism by non-Muslims, as well as terminally restrictive laws that abuse citizenship.

Mauritius, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.



Secularity: Mauritius is a secular state; by parliamentary decree, Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam, Presbyterianism and Seventh-day Adventism were state-recognised prior to the country's independence in 1968 and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was later recognised in 1985; theism is affirmed in both the oath of allegiance and judicial oath.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of "creed" was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2016.

Human rights instruments: Mauritius is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Mauritius did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: quasi-mandatory registration – although Mauritian law states that the registration of religious groups is mandatory, unregistered groups operate without penalties. Religious groups are required to register with the Registrar of Associations under the secular designation 'association.' To become eligible for registration, religious groups must have a minimum of seven members with designated leadership responsibilities. The finance ministry may grant these other groups tax-exempt privileges. Although registration of religious groups is required, the law does not prescribe penalties for unregistered groups.

Recognition policy: the constitution states that legislative candidates must identify themselves as belonging to one of the four national communities cited in the constitution: Hindu, Muslim, Sino-Mauritian, or General Population. General Population is defined by the constitution as anyone who by "their way of life" does not fall into the prior three categories but is generally viewed as including those of European, African, and mixed heritage, a large majority of whom are Catholic. Sino-Mauritians are primarily Catholic, Anglican, or Buddhist. Parliamentary decrees recognize the six main religious groups present prior to independence in 1968 (Hindus, Catholics, Muslims, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Seventh-day Adventists) as well as the Church of Jesus Christ, which was recognized in 1985. These groups receive annual lump sum payments from the finance ministry based on the number of members who identified as such during the last census. As in previous years, the government deferred action on recognizing the Assembly of God, a Pentecostal denomination, as a religion. The denomination has petitioned the government for such recognition for more than 20 years. As of year's end, the group was still considered an association. The government has not provided a reason for its inaction. Religious and civil society sources stated they believed the government did not want to add the Assembly of God to the list of recognized religions, as the church increasingly drew membership from Hindu converts. A pastor from the Assembly of God said that because the group was not considered a religious group, newborn infants could not be registered as Assembly of God members and its pastors had limited access to hospitals and prisons. The government did not offer a reason for not legally recognizing any religious group since 1985, when it extended recognition to the Church of Jesus Christ. Consequently, other religious groups continued to have status only as associations.

Key restriction tools imposed: hypervertical recognition is in effect, leadership quota, non-recognition for any religion not already recognised by the 1968 parliamentary decree which thereby excludes all new religious movements and other minorities, non-response to the application for recognition made by the Assemblies of God 20 years ago. Some Christians and Muslims continued to state that the predominance of Hindus in the civil service favored Hindus in government recruitment and promotion, preventing Christians and Muslims from reaching higher level positions in the civil service. In general, and dating back years, non-Hindus have stated they were underrepresented in government, the civil service, and the security services.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Extend procedures for existential recognition to all belief systems, denominations and communities in the country; to become Dynamic, Mauritius will need to establish a recognition agency to manage its recognition system; revoke the hypervertical recognition system, the imposed leadership quota and the policy of non-recognition.

United Mexican States

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Mexico is a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1857 before being briefly reestablished in 1864 to 1867).

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “creed” was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2016.

Human rights instruments: Mexico is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Mexico voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Mexican law does not formally mandate that religious or belief organisations need to register with the government to operate, registration is mandatory in practice as it is necessary for groups to hold religious meetings outside any customary places of worship. Beyond this, registered organisations may negotiate contracts, purchase or rent land, apply for official building permits and receive tax exemptions. Registration is handled by the General Directorate for Religious Affairs (DGAR). To establish a religious association, applicants must certify the church or other religious group observes, practices, propagates, or instructs a religious doctrine or body of religious beliefs; has conducted religious activities in the country for at least five years; has established domicile in the country; and shows sufficient assets to achieve its purpose. Registered associations may freely organize their internal structures and adopt bylaws or rules pertaining to their governance and operations, including the training and appointment of their clergy. They may engage in public worship and celebrate acts for the fulfilment of the association’s purpose lawfully and without profit. They may propagate their doctrine in accordance with applicable regulations and participate in the creation, management, maintenance, and operation of private welfare, educational, and health institutions, provided the institutions are not for profit. Religious groups registering for the first time may start their registration online; however, representatives must finalise it in person. Religious groups must apply for permits to construct new buildings or convert existing buildings into places of worship. Any religious building constructed after January 27, 1992, is the property of the group that built it and subject to relevant taxes. All religious buildings erected before then are considered part of the national patrimony and owned by the state. Religious associations must notify the government of their intention to hold a religious meeting outside their licensed place or places of worship. Religious associations may not hold political meetings of any kind or own or operate radio or television stations. Government permission is required for commercial radio or television to transmit religious programming. The federal government coordinates religious affairs through Secretariat of the Interior (SEGOB). Within SEGOB, DGAR is mandated to promote religious tolerance, conduct conflict mediation, and investigate cases of religious intolerance. If a party presents a dispute based on allegations of religious intolerance, DGAR may mediate a solution. Each of the 32 states has offices responsible for religious affairs. The National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED) is an autonomous federal agency responsible for ensuring nondiscrimination and equal opportunity, including for members of minority religious groups. A visa category exists for foreign clergy and religious associates to obtain a temporary resident visa or visitor visa without authorization to perform paid religious activities. The constitution recognizes the right of Indigenous communities to autonomy, codifying their right to use their own legal systems for the resolution of disputes within their communities. Indigenous autonomy is subordinate to human rights provisions as defined in the constitution and the international treaties to which the country is a signatory. The constitution also protects the right of Indigenous leaders to practice their own “uses and customs,” with the provision that the law must be applied in line with human rights guarantees in the constitution and in the international conventions to which the country is a party. DGAR registered 196 new religious associations during the year, compared with 149 in 2022. By December 15, DGAR listed 9,960 registered religious associations, which included 9,911 Christian, 15 Buddhist, 10 Jewish, five Islamic, two Hindu, and three International Society for Krishna Consciousness groups, as well as 14 new religious expression groups. According to DGAR, new religious expressions groups are defined as philosophical or spiritual communities born of new beliefs or are part of a broader religion, such as Scientology or the Church of the Orishas.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, confinement, financial quota, in-person registration, longevity quota, nationality quota, stipulated qualifications for registered are ambiguous leading to their misuse against unfavoured groups (possible state definition of religion).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (not free; subject to registration); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; subject to registration); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (not free; subject to registration); religious literature (not free; subject to registration); religious and worship services (not free; subject to registration); religious trade (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish provisions for existential recognition in addition to the provisions for legal registration; revoke all restriction tools identified such as longevity quotas and in-person registration as well as the policy of confinement; establish a nationwide recognition agency; resolve the issue of pseudo-mandatory registration.



Micronesia, Federated States of



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Micronesia is a secular state; however, national and state government events are routinely opened and closed with a Catholic or Protestant prayer.

Protections: No protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1990.

Human rights instruments: Micronesia is partied to the UNCRC and the UNDRIP; Micronesia is neither partied to the ICCPR nor the ICESCR; Micronesia did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious entities are required to register as nonprofit organisations to be exempt from taxation.

Recognition policy: national and state government events routinely opened and closed with a prayer, invocation, or benediction from a Protestant or Catholic clergy member, and often two, one from each group.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, the registration procedures are unstructured.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish distinct provisions for existential recognition; to become Dynamic, establish an independent recognition agency to manage the system.

Moldova, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Moldova is officially a secular state; however, the law recognises the “exceptional importance and fundamental role” of Orthodox Christianity, and particularly the Moldovan Orthodox Church, in the life, history, and culture of the country.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Human rights instruments: Moldova is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Moldova did not vote on the UDHR; Moldova is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory and malregistration.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Moldovan law claims that religious or belief organisations need not register with the government to gather for worship services legally, the fact that only registered religious or belief organisations may legally publish or import religious literature in effect makes registration mandatory. Only registered religious groups may also possess status as legal entities, which allows them to build houses of worship, own land for cemeteries or other property, open bank accounts, or employ staff. Registration also exempts registered religious groups from land taxes and property taxes and allows them to establish associations and foundations. Registration is handled by the Public Services Agency (PSA). The law permits local registered religious groups to change their denominational affiliation or dissolve themselves. The law allows individuals to redirect 2 percent of their income tax to nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) or religious groups. Religious groups must be officially registered with the PSA and active for a minimum of one year before applying for the income tax benefit; use the funds received only for social, moral, cultural, and/or charitable activities and certain administrative costs; and present reports on the use of the funds. The law exempts religious organisations from registration fees and from paying tax on the income received as donations under the 2 percent law. Under the law, a religious group wishing to register must present to the PSA a declaration including its exact name, fundamental principles of belief, organisational structure, scope of activities, financing sources, and rights and obligations of membership. The law also requires a group to show it has at least 100 founding members. A religious group must present proof it has access to premises where it can conduct religious activities, but it does not need to own this property. The PSA is required by law to register a religious group within 15 days if the registration request meets all legal requirements. The applicant may request an extension if the government determines the documentation submitted is insufficient. Under the law, the Ministry of Justice has the right to request a suspension of the registered status of a religious group if it “carries out activities that harm the constitution or laws” or “affects state security, public order, [or] the life and security of the people.” The law also provides for suspension or revocation of a religious group’s registration in case of violation of international agreements or for political activity. The law prohibits religious entities from engaging in political activity or “abusive proselytism,” defined as the action of changing religious beliefs through coercion. Foreign missionaries may submit work contracts or volunteer agreements to apply for temporary residency permits and may reside and work in paid status or as unpaid volunteers. Only missionaries working with registered religious groups may apply for temporary residency permits. Foreign religious workers with these permits must register with the National Agency for Employment and the General Inspectorate for Migration. They must present documents confirming the official status of the registered religious group for which they will work, papers confirming their temporary residence, and proof of valid local health insurance. Foreign missionaries belonging to registered religious groups who do not wish to apply for temporary residency may remain in the country for 90 days on a tourist visa.

Malregistration – the breakaway state of Transnistria (officially the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic) means that the authorities in Chisinau do not have the ability to exercise their registration laws in all the territory the government claims is part of the Republic of Moldova.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, grounds for deregistration and dissolutions of religious groups are so broad that they are vulnerable to being misused against groups unfavoured by the state, membership quota, nationality quota, proof of premises. The Catholic Diocese of Chisinau’s longstanding written complaints to the government that registration law provisions pertaining to the organisation of religious groups were incompatible with Catholic canon law continued to remain unaddressed. According to Catholic Church representatives, canon law grants bishops the authority to organize new parishes and appoint priests, while Moldovan law requires newly registered religious communities be created through the initiative of community members, with leadership chosen by the members. During the year, the PSA registered all 33 religious entities that applied. These were new religious subgroups belonging to existing religious denominations, including the Baptist Church, MOC, BOC, and Union of Pentecostal Churches. According to the PSA, 182 religious groups (compared with 156 in 2022) received funds from income tax payments voluntarily directed to religious groups. A case submitted in 2020 by Falun Dafa alleging the state violated the group’s right to peaceful assembly after the Chisinau mayor’s office denied group members permission to hold a rally during the visit of a People’s Republic of China delegation in 2017, remained pending at year’s end. A dispute between the BOC and the MOC concerning the government’s registration of a village church in Dereneu, Calarasi Region, continued during the year. In 2020, BOC representatives accused the PSA of illegally registering the church under the MOC’s authority. BOC officials said the church belonged to their denomination. The church’s status has been under dispute since 2017, when the parish and parishioners decided to switch legally and canonically from the MOC to the BOC. The BOC and MOC congregations both continued to use the Dereneu church; the local BOC priest conducted church services in a chapel in the church courtyard, while the MOC priest held services in the disputed main church. The BOC’s lawyer said a total of nine cases related to the BOC–MOC conflict in Dereneu were under review in courts at year’s end. The BOC stated the local mayor fuelled the conflict by using administrative resources and his position to interfere in the conflict on behalf of the MOC. PSA has taken further action on the registration of a synagogue in Orhei city following a 2022 court ruling in favor of the JCM. In 2021, the Orhei office of the PSA rejected the JCM’s application for registration of the synagogue. A 2014 Orhei city council decision transferred the building to JCM ownership. The MOC continued to maintain a network of social assistance sites, including day-care centers and temporary shelters, and provided spiritual guidance and services to police officers, state workers, and prison inmates; other registered religious groups had access to state facilities upon request. At the beginning of the year, the Administration of Penitentiaries denied Jehovah’s Witnesses requests to access prisons and visit inmates. Jehovah’s Witnesses sent the Administration several letters asking for the reason behind the change in policy. The Administration informed Jehovah’s Witnesses leadership that they had no members in the penitentiary system and there were other religious organizations performing similar functions. Jehovah’s Witnesses leadership reported the penitentiary administration repeatedly stressed material contributions made by other religious groups when denying Jehovah’s Witnesses’ requests. The Jehovah’s Witnesses leadership requested the Ministry of Justice investigate the matter and provide a justification for the refusal and allow them equal access to prison inmates. The Union of Pentecostal Churches said it remained unable to obtain a zoning permit for a building that it bought in 2006 in Copceac village and used for religious services. The Pentecostal Church’s 2020 appeal of a lower court ruling against it was still pending at year’s end. The Islamic League reached an agreement with Chisinau municipal authorities after it complained authorities asked it to pay upfront the entire amount for a plot of land for Islamic burials at the city-run cemetery in Chisinau. In 2022, municipal authorities twice rejected the League’s requests for a plot of land, even though the law provides the right to burial space in public cemeteries, and all religious groups are required to make only a partial payment of the fee.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (not free; subject to registration); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free; however, ambiguous legislation could be used against proselytising groups that are unfavoured by the state); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (not free; subject to registration); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Provide means for existential recognition that are extended to all belief systems, denominations and communities; revoke all identified restriction tools such as membership quotas; establish a recognition agency that is independent of government for the management of the recognition system and the promotion of both religious education and the diversity of religious belief and practice.

Monaco, Principality of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Roman Catholicism is the state denomination; the Catholic Archbishop of Monaco occupies the highest government office below the sovereign and the Minister of State; Catholic rituals continued to be a part of many state ceremonies, including annual national day celebrations; the government has granted recognition to Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Baha'i, Buddhist, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Jewish communities as well as to various Protestant groups.

Protections: No protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2002.

Human rights instruments: Monaco is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Monaco did not vote on the UDHR; Monaco is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although the law of Monaco does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government, however the need for registration to legally rent a property for worship services makes registration mandatory in practice. Completing registration or “official recognition” with the Ministry of the Interior also confers the right to establish an office or place of worship, own property or hire employees. Religious groups that do register are given the religious designation ‘religious association.’ The ministry must respond to such requests within one month or approval is automatic. In addition to obtaining official government recognition, any religious group wishing to construct a place of worship in a public space must receive prior approval from the Ministry of the Interior. The government does not tax religious institutions.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation of registration procedures with language regarding recognition, secondary procedures exist each time a religious group seeks to build (or possibly convert) a place of worship, vertical recognition is in effect (verticalism), the dispute between the government and Jehovah's Witnesses was settled with the Witnesses by registering the Jehovah Witnesses Association (it is likely this registration does not equate to the same degree of recognition enjoyed by Jewish, Protestant and Russian Orthodox communities). In December 2023, representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses association stated that authorities intervened in and sometimes prohibited their proselytizing activities. The representatives reported that during the year, police subjected four Jehovah's Witnesses conducting door-to-door and street proselytizing to identity checks. The representatives said they subsequently met with police in October, who explained that door-to-door and public ministry in the street constituted a breach of peace under the penal code, which requires prior authorisation for all door-to-door calling and solicitation activities. Although authorities allowed people to contact the Jehovah's Witnesses association through its official website to arrange at-home meetings, cold-calling activities and proselytizing in the street requires prior government authorisation. The representatives argued that “excessive regulations” in the authorisation procedures challenged their ability to conduct their public ministry. As of year's end, the representatives were awaiting further guidance from authorities after meeting again with government officials. In January 2022, the ECHR reached a decision in a case brought by Jehovah's Witnesses in 2019 to obtain recognition as a religious group. Prior to the case, the government had rejected three previous applications by the group, despite a Supreme Court ruling annulling the first two rejections. In its ruling, the ECHR announced the country's Minister of State and Jehovah's Witnesses had reached an agreement to settle the dispute, and Jehovah's Witnesses withdrew the claim. The government agreed to register the Jehovah Witnesses Association. In fall 2022, a representative of Jehovah's Witnesses confirmed the association had completed the registration process and that the government had officially recognized it as a religious group. Prior to the settlement, the government and Jehovah's Witnesses had both stated the group could not open a place of worship without recognition. Jehovah's Witnesses stated that government recognition would permit the organization to establish a headquarters in the country where it could worship and welcome new members. Representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses also said that dozens of their members visited the country as tourists each year and often asked how to access religious services.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Remove instances of partial recognition (which would mean the disestablishment of Catholicism as the state religion if the same degree of recognition cannot be bestowed to groups than Catholics); establish a recognition system that provides existential recognition and legal registration to all applicant groups regardless of their beliefs and practices; establish a recognition agency to deal with this recognition system independently of the state; resolve minor issues identified within the recognition system.

Mongolia

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Mongolia is officially a secular state; however, the law states that the “the dominant position of Buddhism” in the country must be respected “in order to respect and uphold the traditions of the unity and civilization of the people, however, this shall not prevent citizens from following other religions.”

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2001.

Human rights instruments: Mongolia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Mongolia did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – religious or belief organisations are mandated by law to register with local and provincial authorities as well as with the General Authority for State Registration to operate legally in Mongolia. National law provides limited detail on registration procedures and does not stipulate the duration of registration, allowing local and provincial authorities to set their own rules. Religious groups must renew their registrations (in most cases annually) with multiple government institutions across local, provincial, and national levels. Each individual branch (or place of worship) of a religious organisation is required to register or renew as an independent legal entity, regardless of any affiliation with a registered parent organisation. A religious group must provide the following documentation to the relevant local provincial or municipal representative assembly when applying for registration: a letter requesting registration, a letter from the lower-level local authority granting approval to conduct religious services, a brief description of the group, the group's charter, documentation on the group's founding, a list of leaders, financial information, a declaration of assets (including any real estate owned), a lease or rental agreement (if applicable), brief biographic information on individuals wishing to conduct religious services, and the expected number of worshippers. A religious group must provide the General Authority its approved registration application to receive a certificate for operation. The renewal process requires a religious group to obtain a reference letter from the lower-level local authority (district/soum level) to be submitted with the required documents (updated as necessary) to the local provincial or municipal representative assembly. During the renewal process, the local provincial or municipal representatives commonly request a safety inspection of the religious organisation's offices and places of worship and will order remediation of any deficiencies found. Upon approval, the relevant provincial or municipal representative assembly issues a resolution granting the religious institution permission to continue operations, and the organization sends a copy of the approved registration renewal to the General Authority, which enters the new validity dates on the religious institution's certificate for operation. Public and private educational institutions are entitled to state funding for their secular curricula but are prohibited from using state funding for religious curricula. The education law prohibits all educational institutions from conducting any religious training, rituals, or activities with state-provided funding. A provincial or municipal representative assembly may deny registration renewals for religious groups that violate the ban on using state funding for the provision of religious instruction in educational institutions. Under the labor law, all legal entities, including religious institutions, must hire a stipulated number of citizens for every foreign employee hired. The government sets an annual quota in the form of a resolution, and this quota changes every year for each labor sector listed in the resolution. Groups not specified in the annual quota list must ensure 95 percent of their employees are citizens and that additional foreign employees are hired only if the 95 percent quota is met and maintained. The government sets an annual quota list must ensure 95 percent of their employees are citizens and that additional foreign employees are hired only if the 95 percent quota is met and maintained. The law regulating the legal status of foreign nationals prohibits noncitizens from advertising, promoting, or practicing “inhumane” religions that could damage the national culture. The religion law includes a similar prohibition on religious institutions, both foreign and domestic, conducting “inhumane” or culturally damaging activities within the country. Foreigners seeking to conduct religious activities, including proselytizing, must obtain religious visas, and all foreigners are prohibited from proselytizing, promoting, or practicing any religion that violates the “national culture” and law. Only registered religious groups may sponsor foreigners for religious visas. Foreigners who enter the country on other classes of visas are not allowed to undertake activities that advertise or promote any religion (as distinct from personal worship or other individual religious activity, which is permitted). Under the law, “engaging in business other than one's purpose for coming” constitutes grounds for deportation. If a religious organisation or religious representative, such as a priest, minister, imam, monk, or shaman, is found to have engaged in proselytization through force, pressure, or deception, or to have spread “cruel” religious ideology, penalties may include a fine of 150,000 to 5.4 million tugriks (\$12 to \$1,600), a travel ban of six to 12 months, and six to 12 months' imprisonment. The law does not define what constitutes a “cruel” religious ideology. The law on petty offences provides for fines of 100,000 tugriks (\$30) for individuals and one million tugriks (\$290) for legal entities found to have recruited children under age 16 to convert to or adopt a religion against their will. The law provides for a fine of 100,000 tugriks (\$30) for individuals and one million tugriks (\$290) for any legal entity for disclosing an individual's religion on identity documents without that person's consent or for interfering with the internal affairs of a religious organization unless otherwise allowed by law. The law also provides for a fine of 150,000 tugriks (\$44) for individuals and 1.5 million tugriks (\$440) for legal religious entities for conducting government or political activity or financing any such activity. The law specifies a fine of 300,000 tugriks (\$90) for individuals and three million tugriks (\$880) for legal entities for organizing religious training or gatherings on public premises, including schools. The law prohibits religious groups from undertaking activities that “are inhumane or dangerous to the tradition and culture of the people of Mongolia,” although there are no stated standards or legal definitions for what constitutes such activities.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation in favour of registration, annual mandatory reregistration (including a recertification process and a safety inspection which could be an opportunity to misuse procedures against unfavoured groups to deregister), arbitrary enforcement, each religious building including places of worship must register with the government, excessive informational requirements are requested as part of registration procedures, localisation and provincialisation of registration procedures as well as the necessity to register at the national level, non-recognition of any non-Buddhist religion (with the possible exception of Mongolian shamanism or Tengrism), onerous registration procedures (including the requirement to gain certification from the General Authority). Registration and renewal procedures continued to vary significantly across the country, depending largely on the different practices of local government officials. Some religious groups continued to state the registration and renewal process was arbitrary and that prolonged delays left them without any appeal mechanism during the waiting period. Other groups stated they experienced easier renewal processes with less demands for paperwork and fewer steps. The government began drafting an updated Law on the Relationship between the State and Religious Institutions in 2018, but discontinued efforts the same year. Since beginning work on the law in 2018, the Ulaanbaatar city council stopped issuing new religious activity permits, citing National Security Council (NSC) guidance to delay the issuance of new registrations until parliament amends or passes a new law. There were at least 59 applications pending as of 2022, the most recent statistic provided by the government. In 2022, following the Ulaanbaatar City Council's explanation for the lack of new religious activity permits, several religious groups filed letters of complaint with the NHRC. One of the groups reported in April that the NHRC delivered a letter to the city council urging it to implement the existing law and resolve the issues of the complainants. The city council had not taken action at year's end. The Ulaanbaatar city council continued to issue renewals valid for one year for existing buildings, though sometimes with prolonged delays in processing applications. Other provincial and municipal representative assemblies issued renewals for either two or three years. An Ulaanbaatar city council official again said Christian groups continued to constitute the majority of applicants for renewals. Christian and other religious groups stated other deterrents to registration included the difficulty and expense of establishing a dedicated, regular worship site and changing government personnel. Groups continued to state that the requirement that each local branch of the organization separately register or renew as an independent legal entity apart from its parent organization created additional bureaucratic burdens. Government officials again stated that the government used the registration and renewal process to assess the activities of religious groups, monitor the number of places of worship and clergy, determine the ratio of foreigners to nationals conducting religious activities, and determine whether their facilities met safety requirements. City council officials said extended delays in processing and approving applications were due to incomplete documentation, including missing lease agreements, as well as the poor physical condition of the place of worship, such as the lack of an adequate fire exit. In such cases, officials directed the religious organization to correct the deficiencies and resubmit its application. Some Christian religious leaders said temporary unregistered status could leave their organizations vulnerable to financial audit and possible legal action. Several groups, however, reported they continued to operate normally, despite their renewal applications having remained pending for years. Unregistered churches lacked official documents establishing themselves as legal entities and as a result could not own or lease land, file tax returns, or formally communicate with the government. Individual members of unregistered churches typically continued to own or lease property for church use in their personal capacity. Some unregistered religious groups said they often could still function, although some reported experiencing frequent visits by local tax officials, police, and representatives from other government agencies. Jehovah's Witnesses reported that the religious activity permit renewal applications for its two legal entities in Ulaanbaatar – the Religious Society of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Mongolia (RSJWM) and the Evangelisers of Good News of Holy Scriptures (EGNHS) remained pending with the Ulaanbaatar City Council. The Ulaanbaatar Court of First Instance (trial court) in 2017 struck down the city council's decision to cancel the EGNHS's registration, wherein the city council stated its registration posed a potential threat to national security. Although the city council had as a result of the court decision reversed its decision to annul the group's registration, it took no affirmative action to renew it. The group submitted their renewal application for RSJWM, well in advance of the deadline of December 2022. Religious groups continued to experience periodic inspections, usually by officers from tax, immigration, local government, intelligence, and other agencies. In some cases, inspection visits followed routine submissions of registration renewal applications, but the pattern varied, with some groups reporting multiple inspections and others none. According to the 2023 Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Freedom Report, they received an inspection team from the city council in April, but the inspection did not include review of facilities or documentation; rather the officials “condemned the beliefs and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses and questioned why the group did not work with other Christian groups to combine their legal entities, simplify the approval process, and reduce the number of religious organizations.” In May, officials informed the Jehovah's Witnesses that they sent reports of their inspection related to the group's two legal entities to the NSC. There were no further developments regarding any NSC review as of year's end. According to some Christian groups, the government enforced the legal requirement for groups to retain and produce documents of parental approval of children's activities with comparatively greater scrutiny on them. Some foreign nationals continued to face difficulties obtaining religious worker visas. Some religious groups noted that because the law required religious groups to hire at least five local employees for each sponsored foreign worker and the fees related to foreign workers were very costly, some groups could not afford to hire foreign religious staff. Christian groups reported foreign missionaries seeking to enter the country often did so under nonreligious visas (such as student, teacher, or business visas), which legally restricted them from conducting activities otherwise allowed under religious visas. They stated that inconsistent interpretations of the activities in which they could legally engage left them vulnerable to deportation, although there were no known instances of this having occurred for many years. The validity of religious worker visas remained linked to a religious organisation's registration, which some Christian religious groups said resulted in additional visa processing or renewal difficulties. Foreign citizens could not receive or renew a religious visa unless their religious organisation's registration or renewal was already granted. The visa validity period could not exceed the registration validity of the holder's sponsoring organisation.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (not free; subject to registration); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; subject to registration; restricted); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (not free; subject to registration); religious literature (not free; subject to registration); religious and worship services (not free; subject to registration); religious trade (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the present restrictive apparatus that misuses recognition to the advantage of the government to control religious belief and practice of citizens; repeal laws that call for mandatory registration and at local, provincial and national levels (segmentation); remove all forms of subjective language in the legislation that is misused to restrict religious activity.



Montenegro

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Montenegro is a secular state; the Montenegrin Orthodox Church is still culturally recognised as the national church; the state has bilateral cooperation agreements with Islamic Community of Montenegro (ICM), Jewish Community of Montenegro (JCM) and the Holy See.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2013.

Human rights instruments: Montenegro is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Montenegro was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Montenegro did not vote on the UDHR; Montenegro is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.



Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Montenegrin law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government, unregistered religious or belief organisations are not legally able to rent property which is essential to religious observance and administration and in effect makes registration mandatory. According to the 2021 amended religious freedom law, any religious community that previously existed in the country under a prior law enacted in 1977 may register and obtain legal status as an existing religious community. Religious communities and religious groups that registered under the 1977 religious freedom law are entered into a registration book (Book of Enrolled Religious Communities). Religious communities that did not exist under the 1977 law or register under the 2021 religious freedom law and are approved for registration are entered into a separate book for new religious communities. Groups listed in either book have legal status, which gives them the right to own or rent property; hold bank accounts in their own name; hire employees; receive a tax exemption for donations and sales of goods or services directly related to their religious activities; and receive judicial protection of their community, members, and assets. Unregistered religious groups also have the right to freely practice their faith, including to proselytise and receive donations and are eligible to receive financial or other assistance from the state through the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights (MHMR). According to the law, any property disputes are settled in accordance with the existing legal code. To register, a religious group must have at least three adult members who are citizens or have legal status in the country, and provide its name and organizing documents, the names of its officials, address of the group's headquarters, and location(s) where religious services will be performed. The group must have a headquarters in the country and a name that differs from groups already registered. There are 23 religious communities registered in the Unified Register of Religious Communities. These include the Serbian Orthodox Church (the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and Littoral of the SOC; the Eparchy of Budimlje and Niksic of the SOC; the Eparchy of Zahumlje and Hercegovina of the SOC; and the Eparchy of Mileseva of the SOC, registered as four groups); the MOC; the ICM; the Roman Catholic Church (Archdioceses of Bar and Kotor, registered as two groups); the JCM; the Christian Adventist Church; Jehovah's Witnesses; the Diocese of Podgorica-Duklja of the Orthodox Church of Montenegro; the Church of Christ's Gospel; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Montenegro; the Evangelical Church of the Word of God; the Christian Lighthouse Center; the Mosaic Christian Community; the Biblical Christian Community; the Community of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; the Baha'i Community in Montenegro, the Evangelical Church Crossroads; the Religious Community of Jews, and the Catholic Salesian Community of Podgorica, a new group registered during the year. The law allows all religious groups, including unrecognized ones, to conduct religious services and rites in churches, shrines, and other premises designated by local governments, but it requires approval from municipal police for such activities at any other public locations. The Justice Ministry regulates relations between state agencies and religious groups and is charged with protecting the free exercise of religion and advancing interfaith cooperation and understanding. The ministry provides some funds to religious communities and oversees communication between the government and religious communities. The ministry is also in charge of drafting new legislation defining the status and rights of religious organisations. The constitution recognizes the right of members of minority national communities, individually or collectively, to exercise, protect, develop, and express "religious particularities" (i.e., religious customs unique to their minority community); to establish religious associations with the support of the state; and to establish and maintain contacts with persons and organisations outside the country who share the same religious beliefs.

Recognition policy: the government has agreements with the ICM, JCM, SOC, and Holy See that further define the legal status of these respective groups and regulate their relationship with the state. The agreement with the Holy See recognizes Catholic canon law as the church's legal framework and outlines the church's property rights. The agreements with the ICM, JCM, and SOC have similar provisions. The agreements establish commissions between each of the three religious communities and the government. The government has no such agreements with the MOC or the other recognised religious groups.

Key restriction tools imposed: introduction of new property laws in 2020 that could see some religious buildings constructed or acquired prior to 1918 confiscated by the state if a religious community cannot prove their ownership of such buildings, membership quota of 3 adult members, nominal restriction, the government must ensure that bilateral cooperation agreements are offered to all religious groups. During the year, some members of the MOC said the government and the state judiciary did not protect their rights following a schism in the Church. On September 3, MOC Metropolitan Mihailo's deputy Boris Bojovic led a public gathering to remove Mihailo from the leadership of the MOC and elect himself as leader. Mihailo immediately denounced the move as invalid under the MOC constitution and stated publicly that he remained the MOC's leader. The Holy Synod of MOC Bishops expelled Bishop Bojovic from the church, according to Mihailo. On 23rd October 2023, the Ministry of Justice rejected Bojovic's complaint and request to name him as MOC Metropolitan in the state register of religious communities. Separately, the MOC continued to pursue numerous property disputes with the government and the SOC. MOC officials said the MOC should have access to more than 750 Orthodox shrines currently under the SOC's control. The MOC said the government took no action during the year to resolve the dispute between the SOC and MOC over ownership of these religious sites. During the year, the ICM criticized then caretaker prime minister Dritan Abazovic, stating there was a disparity in government funding provided to religious communities, specifically, the ICM received significantly less than the SOC. The ICM emphasised that, while the SOC was granted approximately €585,000 (\$644,000) in 2022, the ICM only received slightly more than €10,000 (\$11,000). The ICM said the unequal allocation was unfair. According to the ICM, it still had not received a response from local and state institutions to its request for a donated plot of land in Bar to build a mosque, initially requested in the 1980. ICM representatives believed that the local government was discriminating against the ICM because the local government had provided land for the construction of Catholic and Orthodox churches. In addition, the ICM reiterated its previous concerns regarding the limited capacity of its cemetery in Podgorica. During the year, ICM representatives described what they said was a concerning trend of marginalisation of minority religious communities. ICM said members of their religious community continued to experience discrimination in the workplace in public institutions that limited their ability to advance professionally. Several religious groups, including the Catholic, Muslim, and SOC communities, again voiced desire for broader and clearer tax exemption rules. SOC officials often stated that in practice religious communities did not benefit from their legal tax-free status because they generally paid value-added tax on all their purchases, and private individuals could not deduct donations they made to religious organizations. Recognised religious communities continued to receive separate government-provided grant funding and in-kind assistance from other government ministries and from local governments. During the year, the Ministry of Justice gave a total of €228,610 (\$252,000) to religious communities the same amount as in 2022. Religious groups and public figures contended that the government favored the SOC when it allocated €220,000 (\$242,000) for the restoration of a church in Niksic and then it provided €900,000 (\$991,000) to establish two private SOC-affiliated religious schools in Niksic. The SOC said the Ministry of Interior approved visas for clergy newly arrived in the country but did not address existing cases of clergy denied residence permits by the previous government.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieronymy (free); monasticism (not free; subject to registration); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (not free; subject to registration); religious literature (not free; subject to registration); religious and worship services (not free; subject to registration); religious trade (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition agency to manage the recognition system independent of government control in order to qualify for Dynamic classification; there are some minor existing issues within the present recognition that also need to be resolved before Montenegro is designated Receptive; these involve the removal of membership quotas and other restriction tools imposed as identified above.

Morocco, Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious



FoRB Claim: Partial claim is constrained by its compliance with sharia law.

Secularity: Islam is the state religion; Sunni Muslims and Jews are the only religious communities recognised in the constitution as communities native to the country; theism is affirmed in the national motto.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of beliefs was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2011 but religion is not specifically mentioned in the non-discrimination clause.

Human rights instruments: Morocco is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC; Morocco was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Morocco did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Moroccan states that religious or belief organisations do not need to register with the government to operate legally, unregistered religious or belief organisations may not rent premises for religious purposes such as worship services. Legal provisions outlined in the general tax code provide tax benefits, land and building grants, subsidies, and customs exemptions for imports necessary for the religious activities of recognized religious groups (Sunni Muslims and Jews) and religious groups registered as associations (some foreign-resident Christian churches). The law does not require religious groups to register to worship privately, but a non-recognised religious group must register as an association to conduct business on behalf of the group (e.g., open and hold bank accounts, acquire land and building grants, and have access to customs exemptions for imports necessary for religious activities) or to hold public gatherings. Associations must register with local Ministry of Interior (MOI) officials in the jurisdiction of the association's headquarters. An individual representative of a religious group neither recognized nor registered as an association may be held liable for any of the group's public gatherings, transactions, bank accounts, property rentals, or petitions to the government. The registration application must contain the name and purpose of the association; the name, nationality, age, profession, and residential address of each founder; and the address of the association's headquarters. The constitution provides civil society associations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) the right to organize themselves and exercise their activities freely within the scope of the constitution. The law on associations prohibits organizations that pursue activities the government regards as "illegal, contrary to good morals, or aimed at undermining the Islamic religion, the integrity of the national territory, or the monarchical regime, or which call for discrimination." Many foreign-resident Christian churches (churches run by and attended by foreign residents only) are registered as associations. The Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican churches maintain different forms of official status. The Russian Orthodox and Anglican Churches are registered as branches of international associations through the embassies of Russia and the United Kingdom, respectively. Protestant and Catholic churches, whose existence as foreign-resident churches predates the country's independence in 1956, as well as the Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches, maintain a special status recognized by the government, which allows them to preserve houses of worship and assign foreign clergy. The Prison Administration authorised religious observances and services provided by religious leaders for all prisoners, including religious minorities. It also respected the religious dietary requirements for religious minorities. The government continued to allow the operation of 44 registered, foreign-resident Christian churches, the same number as in previous years. Some foreign pastors reported Christian citizens generally did not attend their services out of fear of incurring government harassment. Foreign residents and visitors attended religious services without restriction at those churches.

Recognition policy: Sunni Muslims and Jews are the only religious groups recognized in the constitution as native to the country. A separate set of laws and special courts govern personal status matters for Jews, including functions such as marriage, inheritance, and other personal status matters. Rabbinical authorities, who are also court officials, administer Jewish family courts. Muslim judges trained in the country's Maliki Sunni interpretation of sharia administer the courts for personal status matters for all other religious groups. According to the law, a Muslim man may marry a Muslim, Christian, or Jewish woman; a Muslim woman may not marry a man of another religion unless he converts to Islam. Non-Muslims must formally convert to Islam and be permanent residents before they can become guardians of abandoned or orphaned children. Guardianship entails the caretaking of a child, which may last until the child reaches 18, but it does not allow changing the child's name or inheritance rights and requires maintaining the child's birth religion, according to orphanage directors. The law does not allow Moroccan Christians to be buried in Christian cemeteries or to hold Christian names.

Key restriction tools imposed: broad stipulations could allow the government to prohibit religious groups it simply does not favour, excessive informational requirements (biographical information requested of founders), individual liability for the actions of the whole religious group to which they belong, localisation of registration procedures, state definition of religion (as seen in state certification of imams), vertical recognition is in effect (Islam receives the highest recognition as the state religion while Judaism receives a lesser degree of recognition perhaps pseudo-recognition from the state, some Protestant churches, the Catholic Church as well as Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches maintain special recognised status; Sunni Muslims and Jews are the only religious communities recognised by the state). The law penalises anyone who "employs enticements to undermine the faith" or converts a Muslim to another faith by exploiting a weakness or need for assistance, or through the use of educational, health, or other institutions; it provides punishments of six months to three years' imprisonment and a fine of 200 to 500 dirhams (\$20 to \$50). The High Authority for Audiovisual Communications established by the constitution requires all eight public television stations to dedicate 5 percent of their airtime to Islamic religious content and to broadcast the Islamic call to prayer five times daily. Authorities continued to deny Christian organizations that are composed of Moroccan citizens the right to Christian or civil marriage and funeral services or the right to establish new churches. The government denied official recognition to NGOs that it considered to be advocating against Islam as the state religion. The Justice and Charity Organization (JCO), a Sunni social movement that rejects the King's spiritual authority, remained banned but was still active. The government continued to monitor the JCO's activities, and it remained the largest social movement of its kind in the country, despite being unregistered. The JCO continued to release press statements on topics such as political events in the country; publish its monthly magazine *Al Adwal Insan* that covered various religious and political topics, among other things; hold conferences; manage internet sites, and participate in peaceful political demonstrations, including those related to events in the Gaza Strip. Several religious groups reported occasionally informing authorities of planned large gatherings, for which authorities at times assisted with security measures. According to religious leaders and legal scholars, the government's refusal to allow Shia Muslim groups to register as associations continued to prevent the groups from gathering legally for public religious observations. There were no known Shia mosques or *housseiniyas* (Shia prayer halls) in the country. According to Shia community members, they were able to pray in Sunni mosques, but they risked criticism from other worshippers for their religious practices. The Christian NGO Open Doors stated in its 2023 Country Dossier Report that the penal code, which criminalizes "shaking the faith" of a Muslim, put many Christians who talked to others about their faith at risk of criminal prosecution and arrest. The NGO also stated, "While all Christians from an Islamic background can, in practice, be denied their rights to inheritance or family affiliation, this is a particular risk for women. They [Christian women] are also more vulnerable to arbitrary divorce and the denial of access to their children." The NGO stated the personal status law followed the country's Maliki-Ashari Sunni interpretation of sharia. A 2017 ban on the import, production, and sale of the burqa remained in effect. The MOI publicly cited security concerns as justification for the ban, as the garment could conceal the identity of the wearer. While the burqa is not widespread in Morocco, a small segment of the population viewed it as important. The ban did not prevent individuals from wearing burqas or making them at home for individual use. Authorities prohibited news anchors on national television and police and army personnel in uniform from wearing a hijab or burqa. The government continued to restrict the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials as well as some Islamic materials it deemed inconsistent with the Maliki school of Sunni Islam. Despite restrictions on the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials, the government permitted the display and sale of Bibles in French, English, and Spanish. A limited number of Arabic translations of the Bible were available for sale in a few bookshops for use in higher education courses.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hieronymy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish procedures for legal registration of religious entities that are separate from secular ones; establish provisions for existential recognition for all belief systems and their derivatives; repeal any laws that restricts basic religious activities and curb misuses of the registration system that seek the same goal.

Mozambique, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Mozambique is a secular state.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2007.

Human rights instruments: Mozambique is party to the ICCPR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Mozambique is not party to the ICESCR; Mozambique did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory and malregistration.**

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Mozambican law mandates that all religious or belief organisations register with the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional, and Religious Affairs (MJACR). Under the law, religious organizations are charities or humanitarian organisations, while religious groups refer to particular denominations. Religious groups register at the denominational level or congregational level if they are unaffiliated. Religious groups and organisations register by submitting an application, providing identity documents of their local leaders, and presenting documentation of declared ties to any international religious group or organisation. There are no penalties for failure to register; however, religious groups and organisations must show evidence of registration to open bank accounts, file for exemption of customs duties for imported goods, or submit visa applications for visiting foreign members. The law on money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism requires NGOs, including religious groups, to publish annual financial accounts of their income and expenditures and to keep eight years of financial records.

Malregistration – Islamist insurgents aiming to establish an Islamic state in the northern Cabo Delgado Province continued to launch violent attacks throughout the year and make it so that the central government cannot guarantee protection for communities affiliated with a registered organisation in this province.

Recognition policy: an accord between the national government and the Holy See governs the Catholic Church's rights and responsibilities in the country. The agreement recognizes the Catholic Church as a legal personality and recognizes the church's exclusive right "to regulate ecclesiastical life and to nominate people for ecclesiastical posts." The agreement requires Catholic Church representatives to register with the government to benefit from the church's status. The accord also gives the Catholic Church the exclusive right to create, modify, or eliminate ecclesiastical boundaries; however, it stipulates that ecclesiastical territories must report to a church authority in the country.

Key restriction tools imposed: excessive informational requirements, the government must ensure that all religious groups have access to bilateral cooperation agreements.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (not free; possibly subject to registration); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (free); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish a new recognition system whose procedures are exclusive to religious entities and which provides for both existential recognition and legal registration for all belief systems and their derivatives and at multiple levels of activity; revoke excessive informational requirements and the mandatory registration order.

Myanmar, Republic of the Union of



2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Buddhism is the unofficial state religion and its “special position” was recognised in the latest constitution from 2008 as “the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union”; Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Animism received recognition “as the religions existing in the Union” in the 2008 constitution; the same constitution also stated that “the Union may assist and protect the religion it recognises to its utmost.”

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2008.

Human rights instruments: Myanmar is party to the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Myanmar is not party to the ICCPR; Myanmar voted in favour of the UDHR as Burma.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory and malregistration.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – all religious or belief organisations are required by Burmese law to register to operate legally in the country. Beyond the need for registration to conduct religious activities legally, registration also confers the right upon organisations to gain title to land and obtain construction permits. Registration involves submitting detailed information about the organisation’s activities, finances, and members, as well as other requirements. To act as an organisation without complying with the legal requirement to register may result in a prison term of up to five years or a fine of more than 5 million kyat (\$1,500) or both. There are 1,484 monastic or Dhamma schools, run by monasteries and nunneries in all states and regions of the country, serving approximately 285,000 students, or 4 percent of the total school-aged population during the year. Those that are officially registered use the official state primary and middle school curricula but also teach Buddhist culture and ways of life as part of their standard curricula. The country’s race and religion protection laws remain in effect. One law bans polygamy, making it a criminal offense to have more than one spouse. A marriage law specifically for Buddhist women stipulates notification and registration requirements for marriages between non-Buddhist men and Buddhist women, obligations that non-Buddhist husbands must observe, as well as penalties for non-compliance. A religious conversion law regulates conversion through an extensive application and approval process through a township-level Religious Board for Religious Conversion. The law, however, is rarely applied, and many townships do not have conversion boards. The law states applicants must be older than 18 and must undergo a waiting period of up to 180 days; if the applicant still wishes to convert, the board issues a certificate of religious conversion. A population control law allows authorities to designate special zones where they may apply population control measures, including authorising local authorities to implement three-year birth spacing. To register a Buddhist marriage, a couple must appear in court with their respective national identity cards (which identifies their religion as Buddhist) and attest they are married. Buddhist marriages may be registered at any court with relevant jurisdiction. Christian marriages are regulated under a Christian marriage act dating from 1872 and, to be recognized, must be officiated by a Christian religious figure registered with the Supreme Court. There are only a handful of Christian ministers or priests officially registered in the country. The officiating church must submit details of a marriage from its registry to the Supreme Court within three months of the marriage ceremony.

Malregistration – the ongoing civil war in Myanmar involving various militias means that registration laws protecting religious groups cannot be guaranteed throughout the whole territory that the central government claims.

Recognition policy: the law bans any organization of Buddhist monks other than the nine state-recognized monastic orders. Violations of this ban are punishable by immediate public defrocking and criminal penalties. The nine recognised orders submit to the authority of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (SSMNC or Ma Ha Na), a government-financed and currently military-controlled body that oversees Buddhist affairs across the country. The government appoints the Ma Ha Na’s 47 members. The law bans members of any religious order, including monks, pastors, priests, and imams, from running for public office, and the constitution bars members of religious orders from voting. The government restricts by law the political activities and expression of the Buddhist clergy (sangha). The constitution forbids “the abuse of religion for political purposes.” The Election Law states that a candidate’s parents must be citizens at the time of the candidate’s birth; authorities have denied citizenship to most Rohingya, thus precluding most Muslim-majority Rohingya from running for office and achieving political representation in the country. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture’s Department for the Perpetuation and Propagation of the Sasana (Buddhist teaching) oversees the government’s relations with Buddhist monks and schools. Religious education is not included in public schools, although Buddhist-majority state schools often start the school day with a Buddhist prayer.

Key restriction tools imposed: state-sanctioned monasticism, unstructured registration procedures, vertical recognition is in effect (although Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and animism receive recognition in the Constitution, they do not receive the same degree of recognition or state privilege as that of Buddhism), national identity cards display a person’s religion. According to RFA, on March 18, regime police, citing a “failure to submit guest registration,” reportedly detained 15 Muslims, including two clerics, during an award ceremony at a madrassa in Chauk Township, Magway Region. Reportedly, the two clerics were subsequently released, while the whereabouts of the other 13 individuals was unclear at year’s end. The regime continued to restrict the right to freedom of association, including by religious groups. After the coup, the regime required banks to report on all foreign funds received by both local and international NGOs. According to various religious groups and NGOs, the process to register an NGO remained lengthy and was often unsuccessful. According to CHRO, the military regime had not issued any permits to Christian groups to register or own land and properties. All such registration applications remained pending at year’s end, with some pending for more than 17 years. According to representatives of some civil society groups, NGOs refrained from registering because doing so would require providing extensive information on staff to the regime, which they preferred not to do out of fear the regime would target the individuals for detention. A 2022 law imposed criminal penalties for organizations that failed to register of up to five years in prison. One NGO leader said the 2022 law left civil society organizations in a dilemma, hesitant to register because they considered the regime illegitimate, but concerned they could not continue operating without registering. In May, the UN Human Rights Office and the ICJ published a joint report on the registration law stating it was “incompatible with international human rights standards” and that it had a “negative impact on the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms.” According to the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, the registration law, which regulates both domestic and international NGOs, restricted freedom of association by mandating registration, enforcing criminal penalties, and severely restricting legitimate civil society activities. The regime’s General Administration Department continued to take legal action against Rohingya traveling internally without documentation, a reversal of a 2020 order that had relaxed rules for internal Rohingya travel. In Rakhine State, according to the United Nations and media reports, the movement of members of various ethnic and religious groups, particularly Rohingya, remained restricted by the regime during the year. Depending on the township, restrictions usually included a requirement that travellers submit an immigration form to local authorities. A traveler could obtain this form only from the township of origin’s immigration and national registration department and only if that person provided an original copy of a family list, temporary registration card, and letters from two guarantors. The form typically authorised travel for two to four weeks but was issued almost exclusively for medical emergencies, according to human rights activists. Sources stated that obtaining travel permits often involved extortion and bribes. Muslims throughout the country still faced restrictions on travel into, out of, and within Rakhine State and reportedly feared authorities would not allow them to leave Rakhine State if they were to travel there. The regime halted the previous call under the civilian government for Rohingya to participate in the citizenship verification process and to apply for National Verification Cards (NVCs). NGOs reported that under the civilian government, authorities coerced or pressured Rohingya to apply for NVCs, which effectively identified Rohingya as “foreigners.” Originally scheduled to run from May 2021 to November 2022, the NVC project was still underway as of the end of the year. NGO reports contained no mention of authorities issuing household registration lists to Rohingya or unofficial minorities through the program.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (not free; restricted); monasticism (not free; only nine Buddhist monastic orders are considered legal); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; restricted); public expression and observance (not free; restricted); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (not free; restricted); religious literature (not free; subject to registration); religious and worship services (not free; subject to registration); religious trade (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the present order that systemically controls religion and belief and uses brutal force to maintain this control including the discontinuation of the genocide against the Rohingya people; establish a new recognition system that is inclusive of all belief systems and their derivatives, has provisions for both existential recognition and legal registration, and is able to conduct such recognition and registration at multiple levels of operation; revoke and repeal current laws that terminally restrict religious activity and procedures for recognition.

Namibia, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Namibia is a secular state; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance and in the presidential and ministerial oaths.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2014.

Human rights instruments: Namibia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Namibia did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.



Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Namibian law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government in order to operate legally. The law allows recognition of any religious group under the secular designation ‘voluntary association.’ Religious groups may also register as ‘nonprofit organizations’ (an “association without gain”) with the Ministry of Industrialisation and Trade. Religious groups registered as nonprofit organizations or formed as voluntary associations are exempt from paying taxes. If a religious group registers as a welfare organization, it may seek to purchase communal land, sometimes at reduced rates, subject to the discretion of traditional authorities and community land councils responsible for the allocation of communal land. Since September 2023, the government’s Financial Intelligence Center (FIC) requires any nonprofit organization operating in the country to comply with new registration requirements intended to strengthen the country’s existing laws and regulations against money laundering and terrorism finance. The new regulations require administrators of religious and other civil society groups to disclose the personal financial details of their founders, beneficial owners (individuals with greater than 20 percent ownership or controlling interest in an enterprise), board members, and donors of any funds exceeding 5,000 Namibian dollars (\$270). The regulations further require details on the organizations’ “control structure, governance, management, administration, and operations,” as well as the submission of annual financial statements to the FIC for auditing purposes. Potential penalties for noncompliance include 10–30 years imprisonment and fines of 10 million to 100 million Namibian dollars (\$543,000 to \$5.4 million). The requirements and penalties are the same for religious and nonreligious organizations. A still active preindependence proclamation with legal effect on witchcraft suppression (WSP) sets punishments for anyone convicted of accusing someone of being a wizard or a witch; accusing someone of using “non-natural means in causing any disease in any person or property, or in causing injury to any person or property;” compelling someone else to accuse an individual of being a witch; or claiming themselves to practice witchcraft. These punishments include imprisonment with or without hard labor for up to five years, a fine, or both. Like other foreigners seeking to work in the country, religious workers must obtain a work visa. There is no separate religious worker visa.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, ambiguous laws regarding registration laws. In February, Namibia Police (NAMPOL) shut down what they characterised as “fake churches” based on allegations that the churches were promoting civil unrest, inciting violence, engaging in unsafe health practices, and committing fraud. On February 28, the Namibian Christian Freedom Fighters (NCFE), a Christian activist group, staged a demonstration to protest what it said was unfair treatment by police and the unconstitutional closure of churches. According to local media, the president of the NCFE said authorities were “just looking for reasons to incriminate and close down churches”. The NCFE petitioned the government about the church closures, stating that authorities were wrongly imposing an anti-witchcraft law from 1933 to limit religious rights and eliminate smaller independent religious groups in the country. Following the issuance of the new FIC registration requirements for nonprofit organizations, representatives of civil society groups and the media stated the new requirements were an attempt to suppress and intimidate nonprofit organizations, including churches. The leader of a large faith-based organization said some smaller member churches had only one or two employees and found the reporting requirements too burdensome, adding that some did not have access to computers to file the applications, some were unaware of the need to comply, and some had their bank accounts frozen as a result of failure to comply. The government issued the requirements following the 2021 release of a government publication regarding the risks of noncompliance with international standards against money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing. The publication stated that some churches in the country were implicated in financial crimes. The new registration requirements sought to mitigate those risks, according to government officials, in light of the arrests of multiple church leaders implicated in international financial or trafficking crimes. One local religious official said that some churches’ involvement in financial or trafficking crimes was a known problem in the community. Religious leaders continued to state they occasionally faced problems with the government regarding visas, but they viewed this as caused by general visa difficulties for foreign workers, rather than by specific opposition to foreign religious workers. In July 2023, media reported that Chief Inspector of NAMPOL Christina van Dunem DaFonsech met with traditional healers, Pentecostal church leaders, and village headmen in Outapi in the Omusati region. At the meeting, she said some traditional healers and charismatic church pastors were “enriching themselves by taking advantage of vulnerable members of society by crafting witchcraft accusations” against others. Reminding her audience that the WSP was still in effect, DaFonsech urged healers and church leaders to stop accusing others of witchcraft; she said 27 persons across the country had committed suicide in 2022 after being accused of witchcraft. She also said church leaders and traditional healers should stop abusing their congregations by having sexual relations with some members and telling members not to take modern medicine for illnesses. Some of the churches closed by the previous inspector general of NAMPOL in 2022 reopened, and there were no similar church closures by the government during the year. The inspector general had directed officers to charge some pastors with the practice of witchcraft under the WSP in order to shut down what police officials deemed to be “fake churches.” Closure of these churches in 2022 had been triggered by allegations from local communities, NGOs, and local government institutions that some were promoting civil unrest, inciting violence, engaging in unsafe health practices, and committing fraud.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish distinct provisions for existential recognition which would establish a recognition system; the degree to which such a system is inclusive of “traditional religions” and NRM will determine the country’s classification as either Receptive or Dynamic; establish a recognition agency to manage this recognition system that acts and makes decisions independent of government.

Nauru, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Nauru is a secular state; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1968.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “creed” was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 1968.

Human rights instruments: Nauru is party to the UNCRC; Nauru signed the ICCPR but has not ratified it; Nauru is not party to the ICESCR; Nauru was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Nauru did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory.**

Registration policy: quasi-mandatory registration – by law, all religious or belief organisations must register with the government to operate legally on Nauru however in practice religious groups stated they could host meetings and worship services without registration. Completing registration legally allows religious or belief organisations to proselytise, build places of worship, hold religious services, and for their clergy to officiate at marriages. A cabinet memorandum sets out requirements for registration of new religious groups, including having at least 750 enrolled members, land, a building in the country, and leadership by a Nauruan member of the clergy who must reside in the country. The Catholic Church, Nauru Congregational Church, Assemblies of God, Nauru Independent Church, and Seventh-day Adventist Church are officially registered.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, membership quota, nationality quota. Although the law requires registration for religious groups to conduct a full range of activities, local religious leaders stated the government continued to require such recognition only if a denomination’s clergy wished to officiate at marriages. Religious groups stated they could conduct most normal functions, including services and meetings, without registration. There were no reports the government discriminated in the registration process, although the requirements make it nearly impossible for any new group to register. The government requires that each registrant must have a membership of 750 individuals and own a building and land. The head religious leader must be a Nauruan citizen and reside in the country. Although the government again failed to register the Church of Jesus Christ during the year, Church representatives stated it had made progress towards registration and remained optimistic it could ultimately obtain some form of official recognition.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (not free; subject to registration); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (free); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (free; renting property is not subject to registration but building places of worship is); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Establish structured provisions for existential recognition distinct from legal registration; establish a recognition agency that is independent of government to manage the recognition system; revoke the membership quota and nationality quota imposed.

Nepal, Federal Democratic Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

ForRB Claim: Partial claim is made that excludes the right to proselytise.

Secularity: Nepal is a secular state (Hinduism was disestablished in 2015).

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2015.

Human rights instruments: Nepal is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Nepal did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory and non-registration.

Registration policy: exclusionary mandatory registration – Nepalese law does not set out a legal registration procedure for religious or belief organisations as belief-based entities except for Buddhist monasteries yet registration as a secular entity is still mandatory for religious or belief organisations to operate legally in the country. It is not mandatory for Buddhist monasteries to register with the government, although doing so is a prerequisite for receiving government funding for maintenance of facilities, skills training for monks, and study tours. A monastery development committee under the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation oversees the registration process. Registration requirements include providing a recommendation from a local government body, information on the members of the monastery's management committee, a land ownership certificate, and photographs of the premises. Except for Buddhist monasteries, all religious groups must register as NGOs or nonprofit organizations to own land or other property, operate legally as institutions, or gain eligibility for public service-related government grants and partnerships. This includes preparing a constitution and furnishing information on the organisation's objectives as well as details on its executive committee members. To renew the registration, which must be completed annually, organisations must submit annual financial audits and activity progress reports. The constitution establishes the government's authority to "make laws to operate and protect a religious place or religious trust and to manage trust property and regulate land management." According to the Center for Education and Human Resource Development, which is under the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, the number of registered gumbas (Buddhist centers of learning) increased to 92 from 61 in 2022. There were 110 registered gurukhuls (Hindu centers of learning), compared with 79 in 2022. According to the Center for Education and Human Resource Development, 1,063 madrassahs were registered with district education offices, compared with 1,014 in 2022. Some Muslim leaders stated approximately 2,000 full-time madrassahs continued to be unregistered. According to religious leaders, many madrassahs, as well as full-time Buddhist and Hindu schools, continued to operate as unregistered entities because school operators hoped to avoid government audits and having to use the Center for Education and Human Resource Development's established curriculum. They said some schools also wished to avoid the registration process, which they characterized as cumbersome.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, annual reregistration, excessive informational requirements, exclusionary registration, non-recognition of any religions except Buddhism and Hinduism. The criminal code sets five years' imprisonment and a fine of up to 50,000 Nepali rupees (\$380) as the punishment for converting, or encouraging the conversion of, another person via coercion or inducement (which officials commonly refer to as "forced conversion") or for engaging in any act, including the propagating of religion, that undermines the religion, faith, or belief of any caste or ethnic group. Foreign nationals convicted of these crimes may be deported. The criminal code also imposes punishments of up to two years' imprisonment and a fine of up to 20,000 rupees (\$150) for "harming the religious sentiment" of any caste, ethnic community, or class, either in speech or in writing. On October 6, the Supreme Court upheld the 2021 decision of the Jumla High Court to imprison and fine Christian preacher Keshav Raj Acharya for proselytizing. He was sentenced to one-year imprisonment, fined Rs. 10,000 (\$75) and released on bail in July 2022. As of year's end, he had not served his prison sentence. Penalties for proselytizing are up to five years in prison and a fine of up to 50,000 rupees, if the proselytizing is deemed "forced conversion." As in prior years, human rights and minority religious groups continued to express concern that the constitution and criminal code's ban on conversions could make religious minorities subject to legal prosecution for actions carried out in the normal course of their religious practices, and vulnerable to prosecution for preaching, public displays of faith, and distribution of religious materials, in contravention of constitutional assurances of freedom of speech and expression. Religious leaders stated the requirement for Christian NGOs to register annually with local government authorities placed their organizations at political risk. Civil society organizations reported religiously affiliated organizations, including several with long histories of work in the country, had difficulty renewing their registrations. During the year, multiple religiously affiliated organizations reported lengthy delays, onerous requests for changes beyond those necessary to meet the requirements of the law, and lack of transparency when renewing or registering their organizations. Some of these organizations said they were reluctant to provide more specific examples due to fear of government reaction. Protestant churches continued to cite difficulties gaining access to land they had bought several years prior for burials in the Kathmandu Valley under the names of individual church members. According to the churches, local communities continued to oppose burial by groups perceived to be outsiders but were more open to burials conducted by Christian members of their own communities. Many foreign Christian organizations had direct ties to local churches and continued to sponsor clergy for religious training abroad.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; illegal); hieroncy (not free; restricted); monasticism (not free; subject to registration); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; illegal since 2017); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration); religious buildings (free; renting property is not subject to registration but building places of worship is); religious instruction (not free; subject to registration); religious literature (not free; subject to registration); religious and worship services (not free; subject to registration); religious trade (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that possesses within its capacities means to existentially recognise and legally register all religious entities simultaneously and a different levels of operation and activity; to become Receptive, this system would need to be inclusive of all belief systems and would need to treat all applicants and entities equally regardless of their affiliations; repeal laws restricting proselytism and any policies of reregistration.

Netherlands, Kingdom of the

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: The Netherlands is a secular state (the Dutch Reformed Church was disestablished in 1795).

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2008.

Human rights instruments: the Netherlands is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; the Netherlands voted in favour of the UDHR; the Netherlands is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Dutch law does not require any religious or belief organisation to register with the government beforehand to operate legally in the country. Under the law, if the tax authorities determine a group is “of a philosophical or religious nature,” contributes to the general welfare of society, and is nonprofit and nonviolent, they grant it exemptions from all taxes, including income, value-added, and property taxes.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, ambiguous qualifications for tax-exempt status. The government continued to require imams and other spiritual leaders hired from abroad, including from EU countries, to complete a course on integrating into Dutch society before preaching in the country. The government continued to sponsor leadership courses intended to facilitate imam training in Dutch; since 2002, Turkish imams are also required to complete a civic integration course. A representative of a prominent Muslim civil society organization stated, however, that two earlier government-sponsored imam training sessions were canceled due to lack of participants, which reflected suspicion from the community towards the government efforts. The individual stated that a new attempt would begin in 2024.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

To become Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that manages the established recognition system and acts and makes decisions independent of the government.



New Zealand

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: New Zealand is a secular state; theism is affirmed in the Governor-General oath.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the Human Rights Act of 1993 in the absence of a written constitution.

Human rights instruments: New Zealand is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; New Zealand rejected the UNDRIP; New Zealand voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although there is no law that explicitly mandates that religious or belief organisations must register with the government to operate legally, registration is required by law for religious or belief organisations to legally collect money for any charitable purpose, including the advancement of its religion, which in effect makes registration mandatory. Registration is handled by the Department of Internal Affairs, religious or belief organisations are given the secular designation ‘charitable trust’ and completing registration also confers tax benefits. The registration application must include the trust document, bylaws of the organization showing it is a charitable organization, and a list of officers who state they are free from any conflict of interest and that they will not put their own interests above the organization. There is no fee for registration.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Revoke the issue of pseudo-mandatory registration; to become Receptive, establish a recognition system that has the capacity to bestow existential recognition and legal registration simultaneously for all belief systems and their derivatives and at different levels of activity and operation; to become Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that manages the established recognition system and acts and makes decisions independent of the government.



Nicaragua, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Nicaragua is officially a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1939); however, the latest revised constitution from 2014 states that government-controlled, community-level action groups are entrusted with promoting “Christian values” at the local level; the Roman Catholic Church has a concordat with the government that exempts it from having to register like all other religions; theism was affirmed in the same constitution from 2014.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2014.

Human rights instruments: Nicaragua is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Nicaragua voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – all religious or belief organisations must register with the government beforehand in order to operate legally in Nicaragua. The requirements for registration of religious groups – except for the Catholic Church, which has an agreement known as a concordat with the government – resemble those for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). According to the law that regulates NGOs, registration requires an application, articles of association, and designation of officers. The National Assembly must approve a group’s application for “constitution,” or legal standing. Following approval, the group must go through a second approval process with the Ministry of Interior before it can register as an association or NGO, allowing it to incur legal obligations, enter into contracts, and benefit from tax and customs exemptions. Following registration, religious groups are subject to the same regulations as other NGOs or associations. The Catholic Church does not have to register as a religious group because its presence in the country predates the legislation; however, the government requires organizations dedicated to charity or other social work affiliated with the Catholic Church to register. By law, organizations and persons receiving resources of foreign origin cannot participate in domestic politics. The government can fine, imprison, or confiscate or freeze the assets of any person or entity in violation of this law. The law exempts registered religious organizations from the requirement to register as foreign agents with the Ministry of Interior. By law, those receiving exemptions cannot participate in or support activities related to the country’s internal or foreign affairs. Missionaries must obtain religious worker visas and provide information concerning the nature of their missionary work before the Ministry of Interior authorises their entry into the country. Locally based religious organizations must provide documentation and request travel authorisation from the Ministry of Interior prior to the arrival of visiting persons or religious groups. Missionaries must complete the process before arrival, and it generally takes several weeks to do so. The law regulating telecommunication services provides for imposing fines, not seizing property, to sanction media outlets, including ones affiliated with religious organizations, that do not meet administrative requirements.

Recognition policy: the Roman Catholic Church has a concordat with the government that deals with its presence in the country.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, annual reregistration, the government escalated its restrictions on Catholic worship services and arresting Catholic clergy, new legislation on residence permits increase restrictions, the state’s closure of a Protestant television channel. According to a 2023 report entitled Nicaragua: A Persecuted Church? (2018-2022, government-directed actions targeting evangelicals included attacks on more than 50 evangelical churches, the closure of evangelical NGOs, siege and repression of evangelical pastors or their families, confiscations of buildings, impediments to carrying out activities, and the exile of more than 20 evangelical pastors. On December 18, police announced an investigation against a U.S. citizen working with the evangelical organization Mountain Gateway and the U.S.-based evangelist ministry “Shaking the Nations.” Police arrested 11 Nicaraguan individuals affiliated with Mountain Gateway, including nine pastors, citing a money laundering investigation, and transferred them to La Modelo prison. On December 20, the Ministry of Interior canceled the organisation’s legal status and called on the Attorney General to seize its assets, saying the organization had obscured its finances and impeded oversight. All 11 Nicaraguans remained imprisoned at year’s end without formal charges filed against them. By law, all registered religious congregations benefit from tax and customs exemptions; however, in July, several Catholic Churches received property tax collection notices from corresponding municipal governments, an attempt to financially suffocate churches, according to media outlets. When asked about the collection notices, Cardinal Brenes told media outlets the situation had been resolved.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

To become Receptive, establish a recognition system that has the capacity to bestow existential recognition and legal registration simultaneously for all belief systems and their derivatives and at different levels of activity and operation; remove all instances of politicisation in the registration system.

Niger, Republic of the

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim was made in the currently suspended 2017 revised constitution.

Secularity: Niger is a secular state; theism is affirmed in the presidential and other ministerial and senior government official oaths.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2017 however this constitution was suspended following the overthrow of former President Mohamed Bazoum followed by the takeover of a military junta headed by Abdourahmane Tchiani.

Human rights instruments: Niger is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Niger did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory and malregistration.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – all religious or belief organisations are required to undergo registration before they may legally conduct activities in Niger. The National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland's (CNSP) newly established Ministry of Interior, Security and Territorial Administration (Ministry of Interior) now handles registration procedures. Registration approval is based on submission of required legal documents, including the group's charter, minutes of the group's board of directors, annual action plan, and list of the organisation's founders. Only registered organizations are legally recognized entities. Non-registered groups are not permitted to operate, although some unregistered religious organizations reportedly operate without authorisation in remote areas. The Ministry of Interior requires clerics addressing large national gatherings to either belong to a registered religious organisation or obtain a special permit. Registered religious groups wishing to obtain permanent legal status must undergo a three-year review and probationary period before the Ministry of Interior's Customary and Religious Affairs Office may grant a change in legal status from probationary to permanent. The suspended constitution specifies the President, Prime Minister, and President of the National Assembly must take an oath when assuming office on the holy book of his or her religion. By law, other senior government officials are also required to take religious oaths upon entering office. The CNSP also maintained the prohibition against open air, public proselytization events by all religious groups due to national security concerns. There is no legal restriction on private, peaceful proselytization or conversion of an individual from one faith to another if the group sponsoring the conversion is registered with the government. Under the Bazoum administration, there were no restrictions on the issuance of visas for visiting religious representatives, although the long-term residency of foreign religious representatives must be approved by the Ministry of Interior. It is not clear whether this policy remains in effect under the CNSP.

Malregistration – since 26th July 2023, a military junta has ruled over Niger following the overthrow of President Mohamed Bazoum and the suspension of the 2017 revised constitution. This transition to military rule makes vulnerable the registration laws legalising and protecting religious or belief communities. Boko Haram and other Islamist insurgents that operate in the remote regions of Niger also undermine the territorial authority of the central government to protect registered religious or belief communities.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, government regulation of places of worship, increased state restrictions on public religious activity since 2019, probationary legal status (temporary registration), religious conversion are only legal if the religious group receiving the convert is registered with the government, large religious gatherings require a government permit, open-air proselytising events are prohibited. Since seizing power, the CNSP has not enforced the law passed by the Bazoum administration that provided guidance on sermons. The CNSP has, however, used state-controlled media outlets to broadcast sermons from "approved imams or preachers" in which they discouraged violence or any attempt to criticise the CNSP. The CNSP also released preachers or imams arrested during previous administrations in for violating preaching laws that were then in effect. The CNSP deposed the Bazoum administration before it achieved its stated intent to fully implement the 2019 National Worship Strategy. By year's end, the CNSP had not given any indication of plans for a worship strategy. The former Ministry of Interior used its authority under the National Worship Strategy to "screen preachers, in a bid to prevent risks of instability and insecurity that could be motivated by some preaching." The Bazoum administration encouraged preachers to focus on promoting national unity, brotherhood, and peaceful coexistence in their sermons, through the media, or in public places such as market stalls or occasional ceremonies. The Bazoum administration ensured there was an adequate number of designated areas for women and persons with disabilities to pray in public and government-owned buildings; the CNSP has maintained the designated spaces and has respected both Muslim and Christian holidays, as required by the previous laws.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; subject to registration); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (free); **pastoral services** (free); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration; restricted); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (free); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (free); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

To become Receptive, establish a recognition system that is able to recognise and register simultaneously and at multiple levels; revoke mandatory registration; revoke government regulation of places of worship and temporary registration in the form of probationary legal status.

Nigeria, Federal Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: the Nigerian federal government is secular but Islam is the *de facto* state religion of Kano state; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2011.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2011.

Human rights instruments: Nigeria is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Nigeria abstained from voting on the UNDRIP; Nigeria did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional and malregistration.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – there is no federal law that mandates the registration of religious or belief organisations to operate legally in Nigeria. However, some states such as Katsina and Kaduna have laws requiring preachers, places of worship and religious schools to gain licences to operate. The Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) authorises the federal government to intervene in the management of private entities, including religious ones, and gives it broad and discretionary powers to withdraw, cancel, or revoke the certificate of any business or association; suspend and remove trustees (and appoint any one of their choice to manage the organization “in the public interest”); take control of finances of any association; and merge two associations without the consent and approval of their members.

Malregistration – the recent insurgency in the southeast of the country means the federal Nigerian government may not have the ability to enforce its registration laws throughout the country.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, the new Companies and Allied Matters Act has the potential to place some smaller religious organisations under the control of the government. Katsina and Kaduna States have laws requiring licenses for preachers, places of worship, and religious schools. In Katsina State, the law establishes a board with the authority to regulate Islamic schools, preachers, and mosques, including by issuing permits, suspending operations, and imprisoning or fining violators. The Katsina law stipulates a punishment of one to five years in prison, a fine of up to 500,000 naira (\$550), or both for operating without a license. In Kaduna State, the Interfaith Preaching Council issues permits to those who wish to preach in public and regulates against the use of foul, demeaning, or derogatory language against individuals or other religions based on recommendations from the local government interfaith committee. Violators of the law are subject to fines and/or two to five years' imprisonment. Other states and local government areas establish their own modalities for licensing public preachers but do not license religious organizations. The government's ban of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) as an illegal political organisation remained in place, while other Shia groups continued their activities without hindrance, according to the Rassulul A'azam Foundation, the largest registered Shia religious organization in the country. The Kano State Films and Censors Board, a government organization responsible for regulating music and film, continued to require poets and singers to obtain a license to perform all new material. In deciding on licenses, the board took into account the views of Kano's Ulama Council, an informal gathering of respected Muslim clerics representing each of Kano's various Muslim groups, to which the state government often defers on matters that could affect public peace. The Lagos State Films and Video Censors Board regulated cinematography and prohibited the production of films that it determined would undermine public order.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; subject to registration); **hierarcy** (not free; states run according to Sharia law prohibited non-Islamic items from importation); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (free); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to licensing; restricted); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to licensing); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; subject to licensing); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the present apparatus of restrictions and policies put in place to inhibit certain forms of religious activity; establishment of a recognition system whose decisions about recognition and registration permeate nationally in order to resolve inconsistencies between states that continue to plague the country's unity; establish a recognition agency that is able to act independent of government to manage recognition.

North Macedonia, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive



ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: North Macedonia is officially a secular state (the Macedonian Orthodox Church was disestablished in 1921 but is still recognised as the national church); however, a constitutional amendment gave automatic tax exemption and other privileges to the Macedonian Orthodox Church – Archdiocese of Ohrid (MOC-OA), the Roman Catholic Church, Islamic Religious Community in North Macedonia (IRC), Jewish Community, and the Evangelical Methodist Church in Macedonia (EMC); smaller religious groups stated that the MOC-OA receives the most favourable treatment by the government.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2011.

Human rights instruments: North Macedonia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; North Macedonia did not vote on the UDHR; North Macedonia is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Macedonian law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations need to register with the government in order to operate legally in the country. Religious or belief organizations may choose to register as a “church,” a “religious community,” or a “religious group.” The law treats these three categories equally, bestowing the same legal rights, benefits, and obligations on all of them. The government recognizes 43 religious organizations, including the five named in the constitution. The recognized organizations include 20 churches, 10 religious communities (four Christian, four Muslim, one Hindu, and one Jewish), and 13 religious groups (seven Christian and six Muslim). Once registered, a church, religious community, or religious group is exempt from property taxes on the property of the community only; they pay all other taxes, such as value-added tax and personal income tax on the salaries of their leaders. Groups are eligible to apply for restitution of properties nationalised during the Socialist era (provided the group or community existed and owned property during that era), government funding to preserve religious objects or structures designated as cultural heritage, and construction permits for preservation of shrines and cultural sites. Unregistered groups may hold religious services or other meetings and proselytise, but they may not engage in some activities such as establishing schools or receiving donations that are tax-deductible for the donor, and such groups are not tax exempt. The Skopje Basic Civil Court accepts religious registration applications and has eight business days to determine whether an application meets the legal criteria. The criteria include a physical administrative presence within the country, an explanation of its beliefs and practices that distinguish it from other religious organizations, and a unique name and official insignia. The organisation’s application must also identify a supervisory body in charge of managing its finances and submit a breakdown of its financial assets and funding sources, as well as minutes from its founding meeting. The law allows multiple groups of a single faith to register. Leaders or legal representatives of registered religious groups must be citizens of the country. The court forwards approved applications to the CRRCG, the government body responsible for fostering cooperation and communication between the government and registered religious groups, which adds the organization to its registry. The CRRCG has no oversight or ability to influence the registration process. If the court denies the application, the organization may appeal the decision to the State Appellate Court. If the appellate court rules against the appeal, the organization may file a human rights petition with the Constitutional Court, which is the highest court in the country having jurisdiction over human rights cases. If the Constitutional Court denies the petition, the organization may further appeal the case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Foreigners who seek to enter the country to carry out religious work or perform religious rites must obtain a work visa before arrival, a process that normally takes approximately four months. The CRRCG maintains a register of all foreign religious workers and approves temporary residence permits and work visa applications for missionaries and religious workers on behalf of registered churches, religious communities, and religious groups. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy verifies their compliance with the country’s labor laws and the Ministry of Interior reviews security aspects. Foreign religious workers must be approved by the CRRCG and the two ministries in order to work in the country. Unregistered groups may apply for work permits and visas for their workers according to the normal procedure. Work visas are valid for six months, with the option to renew for an additional six months. Subsequent renewals are valid for one year. The CRRCG and the two ministries must also approve registration renewal requests. There is no limit to the number of visa renewals for which a religious worker may apply.

Recognition policy: an amendment to the constitution cites five religious groups that automatically receive tax exemptions and other benefits: the MOC-OA, IRC, Catholic Church, Evangelical Methodist Church in Macedonia (EMC), and the Jewish Community. It stipulates these five groups, as well as other registered groups, are separate from the state, equal before the law, and free to establish secondary schools, charities, and other social institutions. The law allows other religious groups to obtain the same legal rights and status as these five groups by applying for government recognition and registration through the courts.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, government interference in the internal affairs of religious groups is reported, nationality quota, nominal restriction, some informational requirements such as “an explanation of [the group’s] beliefs and practices that distinguishes it from other religious organisations” is ambiguous and could be easily misused against groups unfavoured by the state, vertical registration system is in effect. An interagency working group led by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) continued to review draft amendments to the 2007 Law on the Legal Status of a Church, Religious Community, and Religious Groups. The amendments, pending since 2021, would enable larger religious communities’ subdivisions, such as individual churches and mosques, to acquire the status of legal entities. This in turn would enable the government to support religious groups’ projects when doing so was deemed to be in the public interest, such as assisting with the preservation of culturally or historically significant religious sites, an authority the government lacks. The MOC-OA and the IRC have requested this change since 2020. The Skopje Basic Civil Court reported it reviewed six requests during the year related to registering churches and religious communities or groups. Three of those requests, including two received in 2022 and one in 2023, were from already registered groups seeking to change data, such as the name of a group’s leader, legal representative, or headquarters. Two other requests, received in 2023, were applications to register new religious groups – the World Star Church, and the Tetovo Bektashi Headquarters in North Macedonia. The sixth request was a carryover from 2022 to register a new religious community – the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat in Pehchevo, a small group with approximately one hundred members of primarily Roma ethnic background. The court resolved a request from one of the already registered groups during the year, but no further information was available about the court’s ruling or the group involved. The other five requests were pending at year’s end. The government and the Tetovo Bektashi Community continued to differ on that religious group’s registration. Although that group submitted the required documents for new registration in September, the Skopje Basic Civil Court postponed a hearing on the issue in October, and no further action was taken during the year. The Community submitted its new request in accordance with a 2020 appellate court ruling and a 2018 ECHR ruling that the group be allowed to register and be recognized as a religious group. The Tetovo Bektashi Community continued to say its non-registered status restricted its ability to acquire or use property, such as the Harabati Baba Teqe complex, for religious activity. The IRC said it remained concerned with the functioning of two registered groups it considered “suspicious Muslim organizations” – a Salafi group in Skopje and an Ahl Sunnah Wal Jemaah group in Kumanovo. The IRC asked the government to de-register these two groups and help limit their ability to spread “radical views” that did not match local traditions. The IRC said they did not object to registration of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat in Pehchevo because the IRC viewed that group more as a secular organization focused on the humanitarian needs of its members. Members of the unregistered Tetovo Bektashi Community and members of the government registered BRC continued to dispute the IRC’s claim to full ownership of the Harabati Baba Teqe shrine in Tetovo and the IRC’s plans to renovate it. The shrine is the traditional headquarters of the Tetovo Bektashi Community. The IRC again stated municipal authorities continued to deny construction permits for a mosque in the ethnically and religiously mixed village of Lazhec due to opposition from its Orthodox residents, as well as for the reconstruction of a mosque in Strumica and the central mosque in Prilep, on the grounds the latter two were cultural monuments under government, not IRC, jurisdiction. The MOC-OA said the municipality of Tetovo’s new administration continued to ignore its earlier commitments to collect garbage at the local cemetery’s entrance and to permit construction of a church at the cemetery in the neighboring village of Falishe. Smaller Protestant churches continued to say the government extended more privileges to the MOC-OA and the IRC and these two larger groups had more rights than other religious groups. For example, the smaller churches said they continued to have more difficulty building churches because local authorities were more accommodating to the MOC-OA on zoning and construction issues. They also said government officials met often with only the five constitutionally recognized groups and did not always include the smaller groups in public events. MOC-OA and IRC leaders said complaints of government favoritism were a misperception due to their communities’ larger size and broader presence in the country. IRC leaders said they cultivated good relations with the government for a third year in a row, but some ministries and the judiciary continued to treat the IRC unfavorably. As an example, the IRC said that during the year, the MOJ and the Skopje Criminal Court did not complete their investigations of earlier incidents affecting the Islamic community and its leadership, such as the 2015 “coup attempt” within the IRC and the 2019 attempt to violently take over the IRC headquarters. In September, the IRC said the government continued to grant the MOC-OA unique privileges, such as providing it with public properties free of charge, as well as delaying decisions affecting other religious groups when the MOC-OA did not agree. Both the MOC-OA and the IRC also said that despite religious workers’ key role in ministering to those in prison or hospitals, the Ministries of Health, Justice, and Defense did not always allow priests and army chaplains access to prisoners and patients. The MOC-OA and IRC said the government often justified these actions by citing the separation of state and religion.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that is able to provide existential recognition and legal registration to entities simultaneously and at different levels of activity; establish a recognition agency to manage and deal with this recognition system in a way that is autonomous from state control in order to avoid corruption and politicisation of the recognition and registration procedures; revoke the restriction tools identified such as nationality quota and nominal restriction.

Norway, Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive



ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Norway is officially a secular state (the Church of Norway, an evangelical Lutheran church, was disestablished in 2012); however, the Church of Norway receives special status as the national church and was recognised in the latest revised constitution from 2016 as the “Norwegian National Church” and is to “be supported by the State”; theism is affirmed in the monarchical oath; the monarch of Norway must be a member of the Church of Norway.

Protections: Implicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Human rights instruments: Norway is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Norway voted in favour of the UDHR; Norway is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious or belief organisations are not mandated to register with the Norwegian government in order to operate legally in the country. However, to register, a faith or life-stance organization must notify the government and provide its creed and doctrine, activities, names of board members, names and responsibilities of group leaders, operating rules – including who may become a member – voting rights, and the processes for amending statutes and dissolution. A group must report annually the national total number of members. If a religious group does not register, it does not receive financial support from the government.

Recognition policy: by law, the national government and local municipalities provide direct financial support to the Church of Norway. The national government provides an annual block grant that covers the cost of salaries, benefits, and pension plans of church employees. The national government may provide additional support for other projects. By law, localities provide partial funding for the maintenance of church properties, such as Church of Norway buildings and cemeteries, which other religious communities are required to fund on their own. All registered faith and life-stance organizations are eligible to apply for financial support from the government, as outlined by the Religious Communities Act. The government pays prorated subsidies to 740 such organizations based on their current year membership when compared with membership in the Church of Norway. According to the Religious Communities Act, religious and life-stance communities with at least 50 registered members may apply for state subsidies. Faith and life-stance organizations must provide annual reports detailing activities, opportunities for children and youth, the use of state subsidies, marital law administration, and minimum 40-percent gender (male and female) representation in the administrative and governing bodies of religious groups, as well as any funds received from abroad. The law stipulates the government may refuse applications for subsidies from organizations that receive funding from foreign states that “do not respect religious freedom.” The law does not further define what constitutes a state that does not respect religious freedom, and the government does not publish a list of such countries. Approval of state subsidies for religious and life-stance communities is made at the county level. Members of minority religious groups must apply for annual leave from work to celebrate religious holidays; many Christian religious holidays are official holidays. The 2021 Religious Act instructs employers to provide employees two days off work annually to observe religious holidays. Under the Labor Law, employers may refuse additional days off, even if those days are made up during other holidays.

Key restriction tools imposed: membership quota (but this is imposed as part of a mandatory registration order and is only used for groups that seek state funding so is permissible), non-recognition of all religions and denominations except the Church of Norway (hypervertical system). The Office of the County Governor of Oslo’s decisions of 2021 and 2022 to deny annual government subsidies to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, decisions the Ministry of Health upheld in January, put in place a process that ultimately led to the deregistration of the group, effective in April. Deregistration removed the group’s eligibility for state religious grants and its ability to conduct state-recognized marriages for the year. The decision leading to the deregistration was based on the group’s practice of “shunning,” a collective action taken when a member deviates from certain beliefs or requirements. Christian, Muslim, and humanist chaplains served as officers in the military. Religious and humanist groups could provide chaplains at their own expense to hospitals, universities, and prisons. The government provided 2.434 billion krone (\$239 million), or 700 krone (\$69) per member, to the Church of Norway for salaries and operating expenses during the year, including for pensions and benefits of church employees and clergy. The government provided other registered religious and life-stance organizations approximately five billion krone (\$491.8 million) in total, or 1,419 krone (\$140) per registered member. The Church of Jesus Christ continued to be the only major religious community choosing to decline government funding. According to law, the Church of Norway received additional local funding for the maintenance of church properties, such as church buildings and cemeteries, which other religious communities had to fund on their own. During the year, the government provided 181.1 million krone (\$17.8 million) in subsidies for Church of Norway buildings. The Humanist Association continued to criticise this practice and stated that, to ensure equal treatment, maintenance of properties should be a municipal responsibility. The Ministry of Children and Families and STL acknowledged that some restrictions and registration requirements posed barriers to smaller organizations to register for funding. Most religious organizations and life-stance communities registered and received government funding, channeled through the municipality where the organization is registered. STL and the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief raised concerns that the government’s ability to approve or deny financial support for an organization based on review of its application or an assessment of that group’s religious practices created the opportunity for the government to influence an organization’s religious beliefs or practice. On July 6, the Ministry of Children and Families published proposed changes to the Religious Communities Act of 2021. Proposed changes included enforcing the act’s requirement of a minimum 40-percent gender representation in the administrative and governing bodies of religious groups, updating membership requirements needed to access state religious grants, and developing the ministry’s basis for refusing grants to organizations. Religious organizations raised concerns that the changes could target specific groups, reduce the amount of state subsidies they receive, and potentially lead to their deregistration as officially registered faith entities. The Humanist Association said it was unusual to amend a law that had been in effect for such a short period of time. They stated many groups would not be able to meet the membership threshold number needed to access state grants, and that the proposed changes could lead to increased inequality between government treatment of the Church of Norway and other religious and life-stance communities. At year’s end, the proposed changes remained pending but were expected to be considered by parliament in 2024.

Basic religious activities

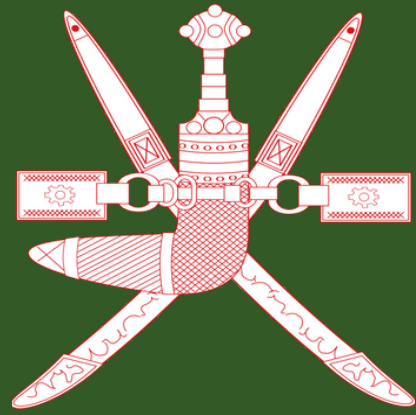
Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

The actions of the Norwegian government by deregistering the Jehovah’s Witnesses, using state funding as a tool to influence religious groups and the proposed changes to the Religious Communities Act of 2021 are concerning and need to be monitored closely for their compliance with FORB. needs to establish a recognition system that is able to provide existential recognition and legal registration to entities simultaneously and at different levels of activity and is inclusive of all belief systems; establish a recognition agency to manage and deal with this recognition system in a way that is autonomous from state control in order to avoid corruption and politicisation of the recognition and registration procedures; refrain from forcibly deregistering religious groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses as occurred in 2023.

Oman, Sultanate of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious



ForB Claim: Partial claim is made that excludes the right to proselytise.

Secularity: Islam is the state religion; theism is affirmed in the monarchical oath; according to the Basic Law, the Sultan must be a Muslim, and the Crown Prince must be a Muslim and a legitimate son of Omani Muslim parents.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the Basic Law last revised in 2011.

Human rights instruments: Oman is party to the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Oman is not party to the ICCPR; Oman did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – by law, all religious or belief organisations must register with the government to operate legally in Oman. Although the law does not specify the requirements, in practice, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA) sets the rules, regulations, and criteria for religious groups to obtain ministerial approval. Groups associated with existing faiths or denominations must operate under the existing registration for their associated group. New, non-Muslim religious groups must register with MERA under the patronage of a government-recognized sponsor. The sponsors are responsible for recording and submitting to MERA a statement of the group's religious beliefs and the names of its leaders. Although MERA does not publish a complete list of recognized or registered religious groups, for non-Muslim groups, the ministry recognizes the Protestant Church of Oman (a partnership between the Reformed Church of America and the Anglican Church), the Catholic Church in Oman, the al-Amama Center (an interdenominational organization affiliated with the Reformed Church of America), the Hindu Mahajan Temple, and the Anwar al-Ghubaira Trading Company in Muscat (Sikh) as official sponsors. MERA must also grant its approval for new Muslim groups to form. Muslim groups must register with MERA as well, but the government – as the benefactor of the country's mosques – serves as their sponsor. All individuals who deliver sermons to recognized religious groups must register with MERA. The licensing process for imams prohibits unlicensed lay members from preaching sermons in mosques, and licensed imams must deliver sermons within "politically and socially acceptable" parameters. Lay members of non-Muslim groups may lead prayers if they are specified as leaders in their group's registration application. The law restricts collective worship by non-Muslim groups to houses of worship on land specifically donated by the government for the purpose of collective worship. The law prohibits public proselytizing by all religious groups, although the government authorises certain "Islamic propagation centers." The law states the government must approve any construction or leasing of buildings by religious groups. New mosques must be built at least one kilometre (0.6 miles) from existing mosques. Foreigners on tourist visas who are not clergy may not preach, teach, or lead worship, even privately, unless they are sponsored by a recognised religious group, register with MERA, and receive a government permit. Visa regulations permit foreign clergy to enter the country to teach or lead worship under the sponsorship of registered religious groups, which must apply to MERA for approval before the visiting clergy member enters the country.

Key restriction tools imposed: an operating licence must be obtained for those wishing to provide sermons in registered religious groups (including for imams) and for which there are ambiguous qualifications, registration procedures are based on a restrictive sponsorship system which sometimes precedes registration itself (e.g. new non-Muslim groups must receive sponsorship before they can begin registration procedures), non-recognition for any non-Islamic religion, state definition of religion, there are different procedures of sponsorship for Muslim and non-Muslim religious groups, anti-discrimination laws only protect Islam and other religions considered to be Abrahamic by the government. MERA continued to provide rules, regulations, and criteria for new religious groups to receive ministerial approval, according to religious groups. MERA considered criteria such as a group's size and leadership structure but did not evaluate the specifics of a group's theology or belief systems. Religious groups said MERA consulted with existing religious communities from a similar faith tradition in an advisory role before ruling on the application of a new religious group. Representatives of religious groups said MERA officials communicated frequently with them to help navigate the registration process. During the year, MERA formally approved registration for the Church of Jesus Christ and the Sikh community and identified suitable, permanent places of worship for both groups, according to MERA and leaders of both groups. MERA also began discussions with the Buddhist community, which remained unregistered and without a permanent place of its own for worship. The Sri Lankan embassy continued to host Buddhist religious services and ceremonies on its compound. Christian groups without their own dedicated places of worship shared existing facilities. MERA continued to monitor sermons at mosques to ensure imams did not discuss political topics. The government required all imams to preach sermons within what the government considered politically and socially acceptable parameters, and provided a list of acceptable topics along with standardised and approved Friday sermons for Ibadhi and Sunni imams. MERA did not monitor mosques under the purview of the Diwan (Royal Court), such as the Grand Mosque in Muscat, which were funded and overseen directly by the Diwan. There were no reports of sermons being monitored in Christian or other non-Islamic services. Open Doors reported church services were "strictly monitored to record any political statements and if any Omani nationals were attending," and said authorities could monitor the online activities of both individual Christians and churches. The NGO also said Christian evangelistic activities among Muslims was forbidden. Christian groups, however, did not report any cases of abuse or monitoring by the authorities during the year. Authorities continued to block the importation of certain publications, including religious texts, that lacked the necessary permit. Some members of religious communities said shipment of their books were delayed, but there were no reports of authorities confiscating shipped materials. There were no reports of customs officials confiscating personal religious materials from travelers entering the country. The government also continued to require religious groups to notify MERA before importing religious materials and to submit a copy of the material to MERA for review. Religious minority leaders said MERA did not review all imported religious material for approval but was more likely to inspect large shipments. They said non-Muslims were often able to import small amounts of literature without government scrutiny. Religious groups continued to need MERA approval to publish religious texts in the country or disseminate religious publications outside their membership. Religious groups said they did not attempt to share material with the public outside their places of worship. The government continued to fund the salaries of some Ibadhi and Sunni imams, but Shia and non-Muslim religious leaders were privately funded. Some smaller Christian denominations reported overcrowding improved at their places of worship during the year after MERA allocated government owned land free of charge or identified, approved, and in some cases provided facilities for their use. In coordination with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, MERA identified additional government-approved facilities for minority religious groups to use on their own and coordinated shared use of facilities if needed. Some groups, such as the Church of Jesus Christ, elected to pay for new buildings themselves to meet their needs. For groups that lacked the funds to build their own facilities, MERA located and offered existing meeting spaces at no cost. Non-Muslims who worshipped in private homes continued to say the government generally did not interfere with their groups' informal meetings despite legal prohibitions on holding religious meetings outside of government-approved locations. MERA approved religious celebrations for non-Muslim groups in commercial or public areas such as hotels or common event spaces on a case-by-case basis. For example, Hindu groups hosted Diwali celebrations on November 12. According to members of the legal community, judges often took into account the religious affiliation of parents during custody hearings. Members of the legal community said courts favored Muslim family members in such cases, citing that Islam was the official religion in the country. The government-appointed Grand Mufti and senior Ibadhi cleric, Ahmad al-Khalili, remained the only cleric able to speak publicly on religious, political, and social issues outside the designated government parameters. For example, following the October 7 Hamas terrorist attack on Israel, he issued a statement on social media on October 8 calling on "all Islamic countries, people, and individuals to stand by the martyrs in Gaza." On October 11, The Grand Mufti saluted the "valiant Palestinian resistance" and said he admired their "commitment to adhere to Islamic teachings." Al-Khalili's posts on social media also frequently disparaged atheism and atheists. Government officials said the Grand Mufti did not always represent the government's views. According to religious minority leaders, the Royal Oman Police continued to collect religious affiliation information from expatriates applying for work visas. The applicants selected their preferred religious affiliation from a drop-down menu on the visa form. There were no reports of this information influencing visa decisions.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); hierarchy (not free; restricted); monasticism (not free; restricted); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; restricted); pastoral services (not free; restricted); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; illegal except for certain Islamic propagation centres); public expression and observance (not free; restricted); receiving donations (not free; restricted); religious buildings (not free; restricted); religious instruction (not free; restricted); religious literature (not free; restricted); religious and worship services (not free; restricted); religious trade (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the present apparatus that misuses recognition as a means to censor religion; repeal restrictive laws that seek to censor all forms of religious activity, both Islamic and non-Islamic; to become Receptive, the Omani government would need to establish a recognition system inclusive of all belief systems with the capacity to bestow both existential recognition and legal registration simultaneously; the disestablishment of Islam would have to take place to ensure the recognition system was enshrined with equality if the government could not prove in practice that it would not treat Islam any different from other belief systems.

Pakistan, Islamic Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: **Terminal**

ForB Claim: Partial claim is made that excludes Ahmadi Muslims and the right to proselytise.

Secularity: Islam is the state religion; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2018 and in the oaths of all senior officials; the law requires the President and the Prime Minister to be Muslim.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2018.

Human rights instruments: Pakistan is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Pakistan voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: non-registration.



Registration policy: non-registration – Pakistani law does not set out provisions in law for the registration of religious or belief organisations. The constitution states that no person shall be required to take part in any religious ceremony or attend religious worship relating to a religion other than the person's own.

Recognition policy: the constitution defines "Muslim" as a person who "believes in the unity and oneness of Almighty Allah, in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad... the last of the prophets, and does not believe in, or recognize as a prophet or religious reformer, any person who claimed or claims to be a prophet after Muhammad." It also states that "a person belonging to the Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, or Parsi community, a person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves Ahmadis), or a Baha'i, and a person belonging to any of the scheduled castes" is a "non-Muslim." According to the constitution and the penal code, Ahmadis may not call themselves Muslims or assert they are adherents of Islam. The penal code bans them from "posing as Muslims," using Islamic terms, carrying out Islamic customs, preaching or propagating their religious beliefs, proselytizing, or "insulting the religious feelings of Muslims." The punishment for violating these provisions is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine, the amount of which is at the discretion of the sentencing judge. The constitution provides for "freedom to manage religious institutions." It states every religious denomination shall have the right to establish and maintain its own institutions. The constitution states that no person shall be compelled to pay any special tax for the propagation or maintenance of a religion other than the person's own. The government collects a mandatory, automatic 2.5 percent zakat (tax) from Sunni Muslims who hold savings accounts in banks. It distributes the funds through a government-run charity as stipends for poor families and students, payment for medical treatment, and support to Sunni mosques and madrassahs registered with the government. Sunni Muslims who want to distribute zakat themselves may request an exemption, and Shia Muslims are exempted by filling out a declaration of faith form. Shia and Ahmadi Muslim communities run their own charity programs. The constitution mandates that the government take steps to enable Muslims, individually and collectively, to order their lives in accordance with the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam and to promote the observance of Islamic moral standards. It directs the state to endeavor to secure the proper organization of Islamic rites, religious foundations, and places of worship. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony is responsible for organising participation in the Hajj and other Islamic religious pilgrimages. Authorities also consult the ministry on matters such as blasphemy and Islamic education. The ministry's budget covers assistance to indigent minorities, repair of minority places of worship, establishment of minority-run small development projects, celebration of minority religious festivals, and provision of scholarships for religious minority students. The law prohibits publishing any criticism of Islam or its prophets or insults to others' religious beliefs. The law bans the sale of Ahmadi religious literature. The provincial and federal governments have legal responsibility for certain minority religious properties abandoned during the 1947 partition of British India. The federal government supervises and controls both religious and secular properties abandoned during partition via the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB), which holds in trust some 200 Sikh gurdwaras and 150 Hindu temples across the country. The Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (PSGPC) is responsible for maintaining gurdwaras. There is no specific language in the law authorizing civil or common law marriage; religious authorities sign marriage certificates, which are registered with the local marriage registrar. The provincial-level Sindh Hindu Marriage Act and the national-level Hindu Marriage Act (applying to federal territory and all other provinces) codify legal mechanisms to formally register and prove the legitimacy of Hindu marriages. In addition to addressing a legal gap by providing documentation needed for identity registration, divorce, and inheritance, the Hindu Marriage Acts allow marriages to be voided when consent "was obtained by force, coercion, or by fraud." The acts allow for the termination of the marriage upon the conversion of one party to a religion other than Hinduism. The Sindh provincial government has legislation allowing couples to seek divorce and granting Hindu women the right to remarry six months after a divorce or a spouse's death. The Sindh Hindu Marriage Act also applies to Sikh marriages. The Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act allows local government officials in that province to register marriages between a Sikh man and Sikh woman solemnized by a Sikh Anand Karaj ("Blissful Event," or wedding ceremony) marriage registrar. Some court judgments have considered the marriage of a non-Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man dissolved if she converts to Islam, although the marriage of a non-Muslim man who converts remains recognized. The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) designates religious affiliation on passports and requires religious information on national identity card and passport applications. Those wishing to be listed as Muslims must swear they believe Muhammad is the final prophet and must denounce the Ahmadi movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslim. There is no option to state "no religion." National identity cards are required for all citizens upon reaching the age of 18. Identification cards are used for voting, pension disbursement, social and financial inclusion programs, and other services.

Key restriction tools imposed: non-recognition for any religion or denomination other than Islam or traditional forms of Islam (excluding Islamic new religious movements), prohibition of the Ahmadi Muslim community (Ahmadis may not call themselves Muslims or assert they are adherents of Islam), both passports and national identity cards display a person's religious affiliation.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hieronymy** (not free; illegal); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the present abuse of recognition and the vast apparatus that the government wields to perpetuate Terminal restrictions on religious activity; establishment of a new recognition system that treats all belief systems equally and bestows both existential recognition and legal registration through distinct procedures and across multiple levels of activity; the disestablishment of Islam may need to occur in order to ensure the system's equality if the government cannot prove in practice its equal treatment to religions; ongoing issues of normativism and societal intolerance of alternative belief identities should be resolved through more sophisticated means of religious education and the use of mutual recognition as a message spread by government on the importance of religious pluralism.

Palau, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: **Restrictive**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Palau is a secular state; theism was affirmed in the revised latest constitution from 1992.

Protections: **Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 1992.**

Human rights instruments: Palau is party to the UNCRC; Palau signed the ICCPR and the ICESCR but has not ratified either of these instruments; Palau was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Palau did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Palauan law does not mandate that all religious or belief organisations register to operate legally in the country, but registered groups become tax-exempt. Religious groups may obtain charters as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from the registrar of corporations in the Office of the Attorney General. As NGOs, religious groups and mission agencies are exempt from paying taxes. To obtain a charter, a group must submit a written petition to the registrar of corporations and pay a filing fee of \$250. The registrar of corporations reviews the application for statutory compliance and then requests the President sign a charter for the NGO. Foreign missionaries must obtain permits from the Division of Immigration, which is under the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection of the Ministry of Finance; there are no application fees. Applicants must provide police and medical clearances, and applications must include letters from the assigning church in the sending foreign country and the local accepting church. The permits are valid for a maximum of two years and may be renewed. The government continued to require missionaries or employees of religious missions to earn \$15,000 annually in order to bring dependents to the country. A couple serving in a mission who jointly earned \$15,000 annually was also eligible to bring dependents to the country.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, completion of registration is dependent upon presidential signature (a form of authoritative decree restriction tool), the registration fee charged (\$250) exceeds the \$100 threshold set by RoRB standards.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (free); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (free); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that has the capacity to bestow both existential recognition and legal registration simultaneously without discrimination of belief systems and has the capacity to bestow these forms of recognition at multiple levels of operation and activity; remove all forms of politicisation in the registration process and remove any ambiguity existent in the legislation; revoke the mandatory registration rule.

Panama, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Partial claim is made that constricts FoRB to “respect for Christian morality.”

Secularity: Panama is officially a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1904); however, the latest revised constitution from 2004 recognised Roman Catholicism as the religion “practised by the majority of Panamanians” privilege (Catholicism); theism was affirmed in the same revised constitution from 2004.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2004.

Human rights instruments: Panama is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Panama voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Panamanian law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations need to register with the government before they can conduct activities legally in the country. The constitution grants legal status to religious groups, which permits them to manage and administer their property within legal limits. If groups decline to register, they may not apply for grants or subsidies. To register, a group must submit to the Ministry of Government a power of attorney, charter, names of its board members (if applicable), a copy of the internal bylaws (if applicable), and a four-balboa (\$4) processing fee. Once the Ministry of Government approves the registration, the religious association must record the ministry’s resolution in the Public Registry. Registered religious associations must apply to the Directorate of Internal Revenue of the Ministry of Economy and Finance to receive clearance for duty-free imports. If the National Assembly and cabinet approve, the government may allot publicly owned properties to registered religious associations. Under the law, no taxes apply to income derived from religious activities such as church or burial services, or charitable events. Registered religious groups include the Roman Catholic Church, Greek Orthodox Church, Russian Orthodox Church, Episcopal Church, Methodist Church, Evangelical Methodist Church, the Baha’i Faith, Soka Gakkai International (Buddhist), Church of Jesus Christ, Muslim Congregation of Colon, Muslim Congregation of Panama City, Muslim Congregation of Cocolé Province, Muslim Congregation of Chiriquí Province, Jewish Kol Shearith Israel Congregation, Jewish Shevet Ahim Congregation, Jewish Beth El Congregation, Baptist Church, Hossana Evangelical Church, Casa de Oracion (house of prayer) Cristiana Evangelical Church, Pentecostal Church, Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church, Crossroads Christian Church, Ministry of the Family Christian Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Church of Scientology, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Babalaos. Rastafarians, which have a small congregation scattered across three provinces that does not own property, have not applied to register. By law, Indigenous tribes control their own autonomous lands within the country, which are called comarcas (territorial divisions similar to U.S. Native American tribal nations). According to the law, tribal autonomy permits individuals to practice religion and maintain cultural traditions without state interference. Immigration law grants foreign religious workers temporary missionary worker visas that they must renew every two years, for up to a total of six years. The two-year renewal requirement does not apply to Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christian priests and nuns, who receive six-year renewable visas, and which only require them to “respect Christian morality.” Clergy of other religious groups, as well as other religious workers, may also apply for the special six-year visa. However, these workers must submit additional documents. These additional documents include a copy of their organization’s bylaws, a Ministry of Government-issued registration certificate, and a letter from the organization’s leader in the country, which certifies the religious worker will be employed at its place of worship. Applicants from all religious denominations must pay a 250-balboas (\$250) fee.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, non-recognition for all non-Catholic religions and denominations.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a revitalised recognition system that has the capacity to bestow both existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives sufficiently and appropriately and at multiple levels of operation and activity; remove any instances of politicisation of registration; revoke the policy of non-recognition for all non-Catholics groups; to become Dynamic, the Panamanian government would need to establish a recognition agency that would manage the newly established recognition system independently from government.



Papua New Guinea, Independent State of



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Papua New Guinea is officially a secular state; however, the latest revised constitution from 2016 made reference to “Christian principles” that citizens are to “guard and pass on” to the next generation; theism was affirmed in this same revised constitution from 2016.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Human rights instruments: Papua New Guinea is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC; Papua New Guinea was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Papua New Guinea did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious or belief organisations are not required by law to register with the government to operate legally in Papua New Guinea. However, to hold a bank account, own properties in the religious group’s name, maintain limited individual liability, and apply to the Internal Revenue Commission (IRC) for exemption on income tax and to the Department of Treasury for exemption of import duty, religious or belief organisations must be registered. To register, groups must provide documentation, including a list of board or executive committee members and a constitution. Foreign missionary groups are permitted to proselytise and engage in other missionary activities. Religious workers receive a three-year, special exemption visa from the government. Applications for the visa require a sponsor letter from a religious group in the country and an approved work permit from the Immigration and Citizenship Authority.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, the registration benefit of “limited individual liability” implies that individual members or leader of unregistered groups do have individual liability for the actions of their group, unstructured recognition system. As of year’s end, the government had not released the results of a nationwide poll from 2021 on a proposed constitutional amendment that would define the country as Christian, and the proposed amendment had not been introduced in parliament. In 2021, media outlets reported Prime Minister Marape said the change would not take away personal rights as enumerated in the constitution, but it would reflect the fact that a majority of citizens in the country practice Christianity. Political opponents, civil society groups, and some religious groups, including the Council of Churches, Catholic Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Evangelical Alliance, continued to object to the proposed amendment, saying the country did not have an exclusive ethnic or religious affiliation and that the controversy could potentially cause a “holy war” among the largest faith groups for supremacy of one denomination over the others and against religious minorities. Opponents to the proposed amendment said if the country were declared Christian, the government would be obliged to identify which denomination was the state church. Some religious opponents of the amendment also continued to say it would undercut the sentiment that all persons are children of God. Parliamentary sessions and most government meetings continued to begin and end with Christian prayers, but according to parliament officials, persons of different faiths were able to abstain with no repercussions. The Speaker of the House selected a member of parliament to start the sessions with a Christian prayer. According to senior government officials, some national government agencies continued to tell public servants they had to attend weekly morning devotions for 10 to 20 minutes; the specific day of the devotion varied by region and agency. Pastors from different Christian denominations led the morning devotional sessions. Individuals choosing to opt out of these activities could do so without negative consequences, according to the same government officials.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a revitalised recognition system that has the capacity to bestow both existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives sufficiently and appropriately and at multiple levels of operation and activity; to become Dynamic, the Papua New Guinean government would need to establish a recognition agency that would manage the newly established recognition system independently from government.

Paraguay, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Paraguay is officially a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1992); however, the latest revised constitution from 2011 recognised “the predominant role of the Catholic Church in the historical and cultural formation of the nation” and that the relations between the state and the Roman Catholic Church are based on “independence, cooperation, and autonomy”; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2011.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2011.

Human rights instruments: Paraguay is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Paraguay voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Paraguayan law mandates that all religious or belief organisations register with the Vice Ministry of Worship (VMW) to operate legally in the country. Religious or belief organisations must submit annual reports stating the organisation’s key leadership and functions. Organizations must complete a form containing 14 items, provide supporting documents to the VMW, and pay a fee of 140,000 guaranies (\$19) to register. The form requests basic information, including entity name, mission or vision, history in the country, addresses of houses of worship, membership size, and types of activities. The VMW also requires the certification of a legal representative and the entity’s bylaws as supporting documentation for registration. VMW regulations require that names of religious entities be sufficiently distinguishable to avoid confusing worshippers. Once registered, religious and philosophical groups must update their registration on an annual basis and pay an annual fee of 70,000 guaranies (\$10). Religious groups that register are entitled to tax exemptions. The VMW may apply monetary and non-monetary administrative sanctions against organizations that fail to register, including ordering the suspension of religious services and a fine of 2,200,000 guaranies (\$300). The National Anti-Money-Laundering Secretariat requires that all religious organizations register as non-financial agents. Religious groups must demonstrate legal status as a nonprofit organization and agree to annual recertification. Annual recertification requires groups to resubmit the registration form with updated information. Groups that fail to update their registration annually must pay a fine of 440,000 guaranies (\$61). Religious leaders must submit to financial and criminal background checks. Foreign missionaries who are members of registered religious groups are eligible for no-cost residency visas from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Missionaries must also register annually with the VMW to receive official documentation identifying their status. Missionaries choosing not to register may enter the country on tourist visas.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, annual reregistration (fees are \$9 which is half the original fee which is in alignment with RoRB standards on registration fees), excessive informational requirements, in-person completion of registration remains a major obstacle (e.g. having to travel to Asunción to pay registration fees and pick up a registration certificate), mandatory reregistration (through a process called recertification), monitoring requirements (including an annual report), nominal restrictions (e.g. new groups may not call themselves ‘Catholic’ due to a lack of distinction from Catholic Church), non-recognition for all non-Catholic religions and denominations. The VMW continued to focus on raising public awareness of the registration law through local radio, social media, and maintaining a continuous dialogue with all religious institutions; it stated it continued to implement the registration law consistently across all religious groups. According to the VMW, once it received all required information and documents from a religious group, it completed the review process in 15 days. During the year, the VMW reported 49 new groups registered, bringing the total number of religious groups registered with the government to 670. According to the VMW, approximately 90 percent of all religious groups in the country were registered at year’s end. Although the VMW continued to offer electronic (email) registration, the requirement to travel to Asunción to pay registration fees and pick up proof of registration remained a major barrier for submitting and renewing applications. VMW officials acknowledged the barrier and stated they were working on building an online registration system that would include a payment platform. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ decided not to register because they found the government registration process too cumbersome. The VMW continued to say it would be unable to approve ICCAN’s registration due to the inclusion of “Catholic” in its title, which the VMW asserted resulted in ICCAN’s name not being sufficiently distinguishable from the Roman Catholic Church. As of year’s end, ICCAN had not filed a complaint against VMW’s ruling. The government continued to support chaplaincy programs in the armed forces that were open to all religious groups. The programs included the training of clergy to provide services to members of the armed forces deployed either in combat zones or on peacekeeping missions. The government also continued to allow all registered religious groups to operate and provide their services in prisons for both adults and youth. During the year, however, only Roman Catholic and Protestant groups used this option. On June 30, the VMW hosted a National Interreligious Symposium open to all religious groups with a presence in the country, regardless of registration status, on the topic of “Education on Family Values.” On December 1, the VMW hosted a second Symposium on the topic of “Values of Caring for the Elderly.”

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (not free; subject to registration); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Revoke the rule of mandatory registration, reregistration and annualisation as restriction tools; establish a revitalised recognition system that has the capacity to bestow both existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives sufficiently and appropriately and at multiple levels of operation and activity; to become Dynamic, the Paraguayan government would need to establish a recognition agency that would manage the newly established recognition system independently from government.

Peru, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Peru is officially a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1993); however, the latest revised constitution from 2021 recognises the Catholic Church as “an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral formation of Peru, and lends the church its cooperation”; theism was affirmed in the same revised constitution.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2021.

Human rights instruments: Peru is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Peru voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: unconditional registration – religious or belief organisations do not need to register with the government in order to operate legally in Peru. Registration with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) is optional. The stated purpose of the registry is to promote a religious group's integrity and to facilitate a productive relationship with the government. There is no minimum number of members required for a religious entity to register, but groups must have been resident in the country for at least seven years to qualify. Religious groups do not have to register to obtain institutional benefits, but registration grants them legal status (as a business or nongovernmental organization) and allows them to engage directly with the government in that capacity, facilitating communication and potential requests for institutional benefits. Government regulations allow all religious groups, registered or not, to apply for tax exemptions and worker or resident visas directly with the pertinent government institutions. Registration is free, the process usually takes one week, and the MOJ helps groups complete the application forms. By law, the military and prison system may employ only Catholic clergy as chaplains, but other faiths and religious groups may provide counsel to members of the military or prisoners. By law, all individuals employed by the armed forces, police, prisons, hospitals, and other public institutions, regardless of their religious affiliation, may practice their religion and request and benefit from the religious assistance of someone of the same faith. The MOJ is responsible for engaging with religious groups, through the Office of Catholic Church Affairs or the Office of Interconfessional Affairs for all other religious groups. Foreign religious workers, including Catholics, must apply for a visa through the National Migration Directorate (SNM) within the Ministry of Interior. If the religious group is registered with the MOJ, the SNM accepts this as proof the applicant group is a religious organization. If the group is not registered with the MOJ, the SNM makes its decision on a case-by-case basis.

Recognition policy: an agreement (concordat) between the government and the Holy See confers on Catholic Church workers certain institutional privileges in education, taxation, and immigration. A religious freedom law exempts Catholic Church buildings, houses, and other real estate holdings from property taxes. Other religious groups often must pay property taxes on their schools and clerical residences, depending on the municipal jurisdiction and whether the group seeks and/or receives tax-exempt status as a nonprofit organization. The law further exempts Catholic religious workers from taxes on international travel. The government also exempts all work-related earnings of Catholic priests and bishops from income taxes.

Key restriction tools imposed: Catholic buildings and offices are exempt from taxation while even registered non-Catholic groups must still pay property taxes, different government offices deal with Catholic and non-Catholic registration procedures which implies procedures are different for whether a group identifies as part of the Catholic Church or not, it is essential that all groups are given the opportunity to establish bilateral cooperation agreements with the state, non-recognition for all non-Catholic religions and denominations at the present time. During the year, the government's registry listed 168 non-Catholic groups, compared with 174 in 2022. The reduction was reportedly due to groups opting not to maintain their registration rather than decisions by the government to deregister any religious groups. The Union of Evangelical Christian Churches of Peru, a group that represents more than 20 evangelical churches, registered for the first time during the year. According to the MOJ, the government accepted and approved applications from all interested religious groups except for two, the International Stars and Sand Mission and the Jesus Christ the Missionary Ecumenical Foundation Church. Neither group met the requirement to have been based in the country for seven years. According to the MOJ's Office of Catholic Affairs, the government provided an annual grant of approximately 2.6 million soles (\$707,000) to the Catholic Church for stipends to Archbishops and pastors, in accordance with the concordat with the Holy See. The MOJ Director of Catholic Affairs said this annual amount had not changed since 1991. Financial aid provided by the government was distributed among the 45 ecclesiastical jurisdictions around the country to support the maintenance and repair of Catholic infrastructure considered to hold significant cultural and historical value. Government funding also supported seminars, scholarships, and the payment of personal subsidies to some Catholic clergy and laypersons employed by the Church. These individuals represented approximately 7 percent of the Catholic clergy and pastoral agents nationwide. The government did not provide stipends to other religious groups. The Interreligious Council met with the MOJ to advocate egalitarian treatment of religious groups, such as providing equal access to government benefits for all religious groups – including tax exemptions on income, imports, property, and sales, visas for religious workers, and the opportunity to serve as military chaplains. These were all benefits for which the Catholic Church automatically qualified but for which other religious groups must apply. Non-Catholic religious leaders continued to say it was difficult for non-Catholic soldiers to find and attend non-Catholic religious services because only Catholic chaplains could serve in the military. Evangelical missionaries noted longer waiting periods for visas during the year, citing a lack of transparency in processing and approval procedures. They also stated that, while the registration process facilitated communication with the government, the government continued to view evangelical groups as associations, not as churches, and did not afford them the same privileges as the Catholic Church. Outside of Lima, the evangelical missionaries said, the Catholic Church had substantial influence in societal and political dealings and more leeway – for example, through a centuries-old network of organizations from grassroots to the top levels of power, widely and immediately recognizable by citizens – in overcoming obstacles to their local initiatives.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieronymy (not free; subject to registration); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish distinct provisions for existential recognition separate from legal registration; establish a recognition agency that manages the established recognition system independently of government; revoke state privilege or apply it to all religious groups.

Philippines, Republic of the

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.



Secularity: The Philippines is a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1898); theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1987.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1987.

Human rights instruments: the Philippines is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; the Philippines favoured in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Philippine law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government in order to operate legally. The law requires organized religious groups to register with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) to establish tax-exempt status. Religious groups must submit their articles of faith and bylaws to the SEC to register as religious corporations. The SEC requires religious corporations to submit annual financial statements. The law does not specify penalties for failure to register with the SEC. To register as a non-stock, nonprofit organization, religious groups must meet the basic requirements for corporate registration with the BIR and request a tax exemption from the BIR. The basic requirements for registration include a name verification of the religious corporation, articles of incorporation and bylaws, the name of a director, list of members, and a list of financial contributors. The BIR provides tax exemptions to established religious corporations that are then reviewed for renewal every three years. The BIR may fine religious corporations for the late filing of registrations or for failing to submit registration datasheets and financial statements. The NCMF's Bureau of Pilgrimage and Endowment is responsible for administering logistics for the Hajj, such as obtaining flight schedules, administering vaccines, coordinating with the Department of Foreign Affairs to process Hajj passports, filing Hajj visa applications at the Saudi Arabia embassy, and conducting pre-departure orientations for pilgrims. The NCMF also administers the awqaf (an endowment for the upkeep of Islamic properties and institutions) and continues to oversee the establishment and maintenance of Islamic centers and other projects.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, dual registration (both the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Bureau of Internal Revenue are involved in registration, excessive informational requirements (e.g. a list of members), fines imposed for non-compliance of stringent registration procedures, monitorial requirements (annual financial statements), secondary procedure, reregistration every three years. Muslim officials continued to report that while Muslim prisoners were allowed to engage in religious observances, Roman Catholic masses were often broadcast by loudspeaker to the entire prison population.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish separate procedures for religious entity registration and then for existential recognition and legal registration, all distinguished from the procedures established for secular and corporate entities; revoke the triennial reregistration policy and the other identified restriction tools such as secondary procedures, dual registration and excessive informational requirements; to become Dynamic, the Filipino government would need to establish a recognition agency that would manage the newly established recognition system independently from government.

Poland, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Poland is officially a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1947); the Roman Catholic Church is the only religious denomination to be mentioned in the constitution in reference to its concordat with the government; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1997.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1997.

Human rights instruments: Poland is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Poland abstained from voting on the UDHR; Poland is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Polish law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally in the country. Religious groups not covered by specific legislation may register with the Minister of Interior and Administration (MIA), but registration is not obligatory. To register, the law requires a group to submit a notarised application with the personal information of at least 100 citizen members; details regarding the group's activities in the country; background on the group's doctrine and practices; a charter and physical address; identifying information about its leaders; a description of the role of the clergy, if applicable; and information on funding sources and methods of new member recruitment. If the ministry rejects the registration application, religious groups may file another application with the ministry or appeal to an administrative court. By law, the permissible grounds for refusal of an application are failure to meet formal requirements or inclusion in the application of provisions that may violate public safety and order, health, public morality, parental authority or freedom, and rights of other persons. Unregistered groups may worship, proselytise, publish, or import religious literature freely and bring in foreign missionaries, but they have no legal recognition and are unable to undertake certain functions such as owning property or holding bank accounts in their name. In addition to having the right to own property and open bank accounts, the 190 registered and statutorily recognized religious groups and organizations receive other privileges not available to unregistered groups, such as the right to teach religion in schools and selective tax benefits, including exemptions from import tariffs and property and income taxes on their educational, scientific, cultural, and legal activities. Their official representatives are also exempt from income and property taxes.

Recognition policy: in accordance with the law, the government and the Roman Catholic Church participate in the Joint Government–Episcopate Committee, cochaired by the MIA and a bishop, currently the Archbishop of Krakow, which meets regularly to discuss Catholic Church–state relations. The government also participates in a joint government–Polish Ecumenical Council committee, cochaired by an MIA undersecretary and the head of the Polish Ecumenical Council (an association composed of seven denominations and two religious associations, all of them non-Roman Catholic Christian), that meets to discuss issues related to minority Christian churches operating in the country. In addition, there are separate joint committees consisting of government representatives and representatives of the Evangelical Alliance, Lutheran Church, and Polish Orthodox Church. Separate laws govern the relationship of each of 15 religious groups with the state, outlining the structure of that relationship and procedures for communal property restitution. The 15 religious groups are the Roman Catholic Church, Polish Orthodox Church, Evangelical–Augsburg (Lutheran) Church, Evangelical Reformed Church, Methodist Church, Baptist Church, Seventh–day Adventist Church, Polish National Catholic Church, Pentecostal Church, Union of Jewish Communities in Poland, Mariavite Church, Old Catholic Mariavite Church, Old Eastern Orthodox Church, Muslim Religious Union, and Karaim Religious Union. Marriages performed by officials from 11 of these groups do not require further registration at a civil registry office; however, the Mariavite Church, Muslim Religious Union, Karaim Religious Union, and Old Eastern Orthodox Church do not have that right. There are an additional 170 registered religious groups and five aggregate religious organizations (the Polish Ecumenical Council, Polish Buddhist Union, Biblical Society, Evangelical Alliance, and Council of Protestant Churches) for which there are no individual statutes defining their relationship with the state. The status of these groups and organizations is regulated under the Law on Guarantees for Freedom of Conscience and Religion.

Key restriction tools imposed: excessive informational requirements are requested as part of registration procedures (including personal information of at least 100 citizen members), it is essential that all religious groups are given access to bilateral cooperation agreements, membership quota. Citing various deficiencies in the applications, the MIA denied the registration of four religious groups during the year: the Church of the Risen (applied in 2020), the Shekinah Christian Church (applied in 2021), Vedic Society Religious Union (applied in 2021), and the “Wisdom of Nature” Church (applied in 2022). In addition, ruling the applicants did not meet the criteria for registering as a religious group, the MIA discontinued the administrative proceedings to register the Kriya Yoga Spiritual Path (applied in 2019), “Tsechen Menri Ling” organization (applied in 2021), and Church of People of the Sun (applied in 2021) and refused to initiate the registration procedure for the Polish Union of Early Buddhism (applied in 2022). During the year, the MIA removed the Hatha Yoga Union “Gate to Yoga” group from the registry at the request of the group. In January, the MIA upheld its earlier decision to discontinue the registration procedure of the Self–Family group (also known as Friendship Family, which applied in 2020). In March, the group filed an appeal with the Warsaw Administrative Court. On April 6, the MIA sent a response to the court, requesting that it dismiss the complaint. At year's end, the court had not ruled on the case.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Revoke state privilege for the Catholic Church except if such privileges are also equally bestowed to all religious denominations; establish a revitalised recognition system that has the capacity to bestow both existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives sufficiently and appropriately and at multiple levels of operation and activity; to become Dynamic, the Polish government would need to establish a recognition agency that would manage the newly established recognition system independently from government; revoke the excessive informational requirements and the membership quota.

Portuguese Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Portugal is a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1910); the Roman Catholic Church receives exclusive privileges and special status.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2005.

Human rights instruments: Portugal is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Portugal did not vote on the UDHR; Portugal is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Portuguese law states that registration for religious or belief organisations with the government is not mandatory, the fact that only clergy belonging to registered religions may provide pastoral care to members in prisons, hospitals and military facilities makes registration in effect mandatory as the performance of pastoral care to religious adherents is a fundamental religious function. All religious groups with an organized presence in the country may apply for registration with the registrar of religious corporate bodies in the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). According to the Religious Freedom Commission (CLR), there are 99 registered religious groups in the country, compared to 92 in 2022, and 50 in 2011. The requirements for registration include providing the organization's official name, which must be distinguishable from all other religious corporate bodies in the country; the organizing documents of the church or religious community associated with the group applying for registration; the address of the organization's registered main office in the country; a statement of the group's religious purposes; documentation of the organization's assets; information on the organization's formation, composition, rules, and activities; provisions for dissolution of the organization; and the appointment method and powers of the organization's representatives. Subsidiary or affiliated organizations may be included in the parent group's application; if not included, they must register separately. The MOJ may reject a registration application if it fails to meet legal requirements, includes false documentation, or violates the constitutional right of religious freedom. If the MOJ rejects an application, religious groups may appeal to the CLR within 30 days of receiving the ministry's decision. Religious groups may register as religious corporations and receive tax-exempt status. Registered groups have the right to minister in prisons, hospitals, and military facilities; provide religious teaching in public schools; access broadcasting time on public television and radio; and receive national recognition of religious holidays. The government certifies religious ministers, who receive all the benefits of the social security system. Chaplaincies for military services, prisons, and hospitals are state-funded positions open to all registered religious groups, although chaplains are predominantly Catholic. A taxpayer may allocate 5 percent of income tax payments to any registered religious group. Religious groups may organize in a variety of forms that have national, regional, or local character. A denomination may organize as one national church or religious community or as several regional or local churches or religious communities. An international church or religious community may establish a representative organization of its adherents separate from the branch of the church or religious community existing in the country. A registered church or religious community may create subsidiary or affiliated organizations, such as associations, foundations, or federations. Religious groups may also register as unincorporated associations or private corporations, which allows them to receive the same benefits granted to religious corporations. The same process as for religious corporations applies for registering as unincorporated associations or private corporations. There are no practical differences between them other than internal administration. Unregistered religious groups are not subject to penalties and may practice their religion but do not receive the benefits associated with registration. By law, religious groups registered in the country for at least 30 years or "internationally recognized" for 60 years may obtain the higher registration status of a "religion settled in the country." To show they qualify for this status, religious groups must demonstrate an "organized social presence" for the required length of time. These groups receive government subsidies based on the number of their members; may conclude "mutual interest" agreements with the state on issues such as education, culture, or other forms of cooperation; and may celebrate marriages that are recognized by the state legal system. The government has mutual interest agreements with Jewish and Islamic religious bodies and a concordat with the Holy See that serves the same function for the Catholic Church.

Recognition policy: the CLR is an independent, consultative body to parliament and the government, established by law. Its members include two representatives of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference (Roman Catholic); representatives of three religious groups (the Evangelical Alliance, the Islamic Community of Lisbon, and the Jewish Community of Lisbon) appointed by the MOJ; and five laypersons, three of whom are affiliated with the Ismaili Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist communities. The Council of Ministers appoints its president. The CLR reviews and opines on all matters relating to the application of the law on religious freedom, including proposed amendments. The CLR notifies the relevant authorities, including the President, parliament, and other government officials, regarding cases involving religious freedom and discrimination, such as restrictions or prohibitions on the right to assemble or hold religious services, destruction or desecration of religious property, assaults on lay members and clergy, incitement of religious discord, hate speech, and violations of the rights of foreign missionaries. Most prisons, state and private hospitals, and military services designated Catholic priests to provide chaplaincy services, but these positions were open to clergy of all religious groups.

Key restriction tools imposed: excessive informational requirements, it is essential that bilateral cooperation agreements with the Portuguese state are made available to all religious groups, religion settled in the country (including ambiguous qualifications and longevity quotas), subsidiary and affiliated organisations with a religious groups must undergo separate registration procedures if they are not registered when their parent organisation is registered.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; broadcasting subject to registration); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Reorganise the CLR as a recognition agency independent of government control yet retaining the authority of government in matters of religious freedom and religious recognition; revoke the existence of vertical recognition and longevity quotas.



Qatar, State of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious



ForB Claim: Partial claim is made that excludes the right to proselytise and constricts ForB to a sharia interpretation.

Secularity: Islam is the state religion; state privilege (Wahhabism); blasphemy laws only protect religions considered Abrahamic including only Christianity, Islam and Judaism; theism is affirmed in the monarchical and ministerial oaths; the Emir must be Muslim.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2003.

Human rights instruments: Qatar is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Qatar did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – all non-Islamic religious or belief organisations must register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to operate legally in Qatar. The law only recognises expatriates as belonging to non-Islamic groups. The only registered religious groups are Sunni and Shia Muslims and eight Christian denominations: the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Maronite, evangelical Protestant, and the Interdenominational Christian Churches. Protestant denominations other than the registered eight denominations, including nondenominational house churches, may register with the MFA with the CCSC's support. Registered groups may hold bank accounts in the organisation's name, apply for property to build worship spaces (or have already built structures, such as private villas, recognized as worship spaces), import religious texts such as Bibles or Qurans, and publish religious newsletters or flyers for internal distribution. Unregistered entities are unable to open accounts, solicit funds, acquire religious texts from outside the country, publish religiously themed newsletters or pamphlets, or legally hire staff. Unregistered religious groups are illegal, but authorities generally permit them to practice their faith in private. The law restricts public worship for non-Islamic faiths. It prohibits non-Muslim religious groups from displaying religious symbols, which includes banning Christian congregations from advertising religious services or placing crosses outdoors where they are visible to the public. The law criminalizes establishing or running an organization aimed at opposing or challenging Islam or promoting another religion and provides for punishment of up to 10 years in prison. Proselytizing on one's own accord for any religion other than Islam may result in a sentence of up to five years' imprisonment. The law calls for two years' imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 riyals (\$2,700) for possession of written or recorded materials or items that support or promote missionary activity. The government regulates the publication, importation, and distribution of all religious books and materials. The government reviews, censors, or bans foreign newspapers, magazines, films, and books for objectionable sexual, religious, and political content. Registered religious groups may publish newsletters without government censorship but may only distribute them internally within their respective communities. Public bookstores are not allowed to sell Bibles. To import religious materials, groups must submit one copy to the Ministry of Culture and receive written approval before making large orders or risk having the entire shipment confiscated. The only religions registered to have their own places of worship are Islam and Christianity. All mosques and Islamic institutions in the country, including Shia husseiniyas (congregation halls), must be registered with the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (MEIA). The law designates the MEIA minister as the final authority for approving Islamic religious centers. The MFA approves Christian churches in coordination with the private office of the Emir. The Office of the Secretary General of the MFA, working in coordination with the director of the MEIA's Human Rights Department, is responsible for handling church affairs. A non-Muslim woman addressed by law to convert to Islam when marrying a Muslim; however, the law considers offspring of such a marriage to be Muslim. The law dictates that a non-Muslim man marrying a Muslim woman must convert to Islam. Marriages between two Muslims are performed at the Sharia Court in the Supreme Judicial Council. Marriages for religious minorities registered with the MFA – currently only Christian churches – may be performed by clergy recognized by the MFA and then registered with the Office of Land Registration and Legalization at the Ministry of Justice. Religious minorities not registered or not recognized by the MFA – including members of the Baha'i, Hindu, Sikh, and Jewish faiths, and atheists – must get married abroad to receive marriage certificates and then undertake a legal process, first in the foreign country and then in Qatar, culminating with the MFA attesting to the certificate. There is no civil marriage.

Key restriction tools imposed: criminalisation of unregistration (illegal for unregistered groups to hold religious services and to import their literature), religion by default, state definition of religion, restrictive system of patronage in which groups must belong to a patron organisation to operate legally, state-sanctioned religious organisations, strict state regulation of religious activity (e.g. the state oversees construction of mosques, hiring of imams, and provides guidance for sermons), unofficial prohibition of the Baha'i Faith, strict recognition (Islam state religion, recognised groups and unrecognised groups; a form of verticalism). Conversion to another religion from Islam is defined by the law as apostasy and is illegal, although there have been no recorded punishments for apostasy since the country's independence in 1971. According to the penal code, all individuals regardless of religious affiliation seen eating or drinking during daylight hours during Ramadan are subject to a fine of 3,000 riyals (\$800), three months' imprisonment, or both. By law, a deceased person must be either buried within the country or the body repatriated to the home country. The law does not permit cremation. On March 20, the Baha'i International Community, which represents the worldwide Baha'i Community, issued a statement addressed to the UN Human Rights Council and reminding Qatari authorities "of their obligations to guarantee the rights of all to freely practice the religion of their choice without any fear of punishment." Making reference to the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief's emphasis on the role of the state in protecting the rights of religious minorities, the Baha'i International Community wrote that "Qatar is slowly pursuing a number of actions which will ultimately lead to the eradication of one of its religious minorities from society: the members of the Baha'i Faith, many of whom were born in Qatar and whose families have been there for generations." According to the statement, "many Baha'is find out that they have been blacklisted when they seek to renew their residency permits or try to obtain a certificate of good conduct in order to change jobs" and "in reality, their only 'crime' is their belief in the Baha'i Faith!" The statement mentions the Baha'i International Community's repeated but failed attempts to meet with government authorities. In November 2023, the government gave permission to the Evangelical Church Alliance in Qatar (ECAQ) to build a church at the Mesaymeer Religious Complex, also known as "Church City" and located on government-owned land, allocating a plot of land for construction of the church. Sixty villa churches were registered with the Ministry of Interior as worshipping under ECAQ's umbrella. During the year, the government reiterated it would consider requests from nonregistered religious groups to acquire a place of worship if they applied to register but, as in previous years, it said none had done so. Members of the Hindu community stated they were largely pleased that there was no government interference in the community's private expressions of faith; however, they said they would like a formally recognized place of Hindu worship. The MEIA continued to hire Sunni and Shia clerics and assist them to specific mosques. The ministry continued to provide, on an ad hoc basis, thematic guidance for Friday sermons, focusing mainly on Islamic rituals and social values, with clear restrictions against using pulpits to express political views or to attack other faiths. The ministry reviewed the content of all sermons but did not require clerics to obtain prior approval of their sermons. The government reserved the right to take judicial action, ranging from counseling to suspension or dismissal, of individuals who did not follow the guidance. Representatives of the Islamic Cultural Center in Doha (Fanaar Mosque) reported they provided some points on Islamic teaching on the dignity of persons with disabilities for sermons. According to the MEIA, as of 2021 (the latest figure available), there were approximately 2,300 mosques in the country. Government officials estimated as many as 10 of these were Shia mosques, although online sources stated the number was closer to 15. Officials stated the MEIA did not allow foreign funding for the building or upkeep of Shia mosques or other community facilities. According to members of the Hindu community, because the law did not permit cremation, which Hinduism traditionally requires within 24 hours of a death, funeral rites, called antyesti, were difficult to arrange. Although the law prohibits Christian groups from advertising religious services, Christian churches continued to post hours of services and other information on publicly accessible websites; however, the government continued to prohibit them from publishing such information in local newspapers or on public bulletin boards. Church leaders and religious groups said individuals habitually practiced self-censorship when expressing religious views online and relied mostly on word of mouth, church websites, social media platforms, and email newsletters to distribute information about religious groups' activities. The government maintained its policy of reviewing, censoring, or banning newspapers, magazines, books, and social media for "objectionable" religious content, such as an attack on Islamic values or depictions of the Prophet Muhammad. The government-controlled internet service provider, Ooredoo, censored religious internet content through a proxy server that monitored and blocked websites, email, and voice over internet protocol platforms, including Skype and FaceTime. Journalists and publishers said they continued to practice self-censorship due to political or economic pressures regarding material the government might consider denigrating to Islam. The Mesaymeer Religious Complex continued to provide worship space for the eight registered Christian denominations, with clear government instructions that Christian symbols such as crosses, steeples, and statues were not permitted on the exterior of church buildings. The Anglican Center within the Mesaymeer Religious Complex housed several other smaller denominations and offered space to 88 congregations of different denominations and languages. According to church leaders, approximately 100 expatriate Christians continued to attend weekly services at the Mesaymeer Religious Complex. Representatives of the CCSC reported overcrowding in seven buildings in the complex, and they noted difficulties with parking, access, and time-sharing of worship space. In addition to the permanent buildings, the government allowed the churches to erect tents during Easter and Christmas outside the primary complex to accommodate additional congregants. The government continued to enforce strict security measures at the complex, including closing parking lots, setting a curfew on church access, using metal detectors, and x-raying bags. Ministry of Interior security personnel asked churchgoers to show identification at the gates because non-Christians, whether expatriates or citizens, were prohibited access to the complex. The government continued its ban on worship outside the complex. The CCSC continued to report that Christian clergy were allowed to visit members of their congregations when they were hospitalized and to conduct monthly trips to both male and female prisons to meet with incarcerated Christians. Church leaders again reported the government limited their ability to collect and distribute funds for charity, including through restrictions on the number and type of bank accounts churches could hold, as well as through reporting requirements on donors and on contractors doing business with churches. Some smaller unregistered churches reportedly used the personal accounts of religious leaders for church activities. During the year, representatives of the Baha'i Faith community reported they were experiencing increased government intimidation. A Baha'i community leader stated that several Baha'i foreign residents were denied security clearances or certificates of good conduct by the government when offered new jobs and indicated that they believed this was because of their religious beliefs. Another was fired from his job without notice. Many said they had to leave the country, with one Baha'i characterizing the government's actions towards this group as "economic strangulation." Members of the Baha'i Faith community said they continued to seek internal lines of communication with the government to resolve tension but were unable to meet with government officials during the year.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; illegal to convert from Islam); **hierony** (not free; preapproval required); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; both public and private non-Islamic forms are illegal); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; the only religions allowed places of worship are Islam and Christianity); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted; preapproval required); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the present apparatus that censoriously restricts religious activity; repeal the series of laws that censor non-Islamic religion and belief; revoke the rule of mandatory registration for non-Islamic groups; to become Receptive, establish a recognition system that is inclusive of at least all established or traditional belief systems and be able to bestow existential recognition and legal registration simultaneously and at different levels of activity; to become Dynamic, this system would need to also be inclusive of NRMs or non-traditional belief systems.

Romania

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Romania is officially a secular state (the Romanian Orthodox Church was disestablished in 1947 but is still recognised as the national church); however, the law on religious freedom recognises the “important role of the Romanian Orthodox Church,” as well as the role of “other churches and denominations as recognised by the national history” of the country; theism is affirmed in the presidential oath.



Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2003.

Human rights instruments: Romania is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Romania was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Romania did not vote on the UDHR; Romania is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Romanian law does not formally mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government in order to operate legally in the country, registration is required for religious or belief organisations to publish or import religious literature which is a fundamental function of a religious group and so registration becomes in effect mandatory. The provisions of the law devoted to religion stipulate a three-tier system of religious classification, with “religious denominations” at the highest level, followed by “religious associations” and “religious groups” at the most basic level. Organizations in the top two tiers are legal entities, while religious groups are not. Civil society associations established under separate provisions of the law governing associations and foundations may also engage in religious activities and have the status of legal entities. The constitution states religious denominations shall be autonomous and enjoy state support, including the facilitation of religious assistance in the army, hospitals, penitentiaries, retirement homes, and orphanages. Only clergy members of recognized religious denominations may be hired by the government as military or prison chaplains. Regulations state clergy members of religious associations may be granted access to prisons on a case-by-case basis in certain conditions. There are no similar regulations for religious groups. The law forbids public authorities or private legal entities from asking individuals to specify their religion, except for the census. By law, there are 18 religious organizations recognized as “religious denominations,” all of which were in existence at the time the law on religion was enacted in 2006: the ROC, Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara, Roman Catholic Church, Greek Catholic Church, Old Rite Russian Christian (Orthodox) Church, Reformed (Protestant) Church, Christian Evangelical Church, Romanian Evangelical Church, Evangelical Augustan Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Unitarian Church, Baptist Church, Pentecostal Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Federation of Jewish Communities, Muslim Denomination (Islam), and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Additional organizations seeking recognition as religious denominations must demonstrate 12 years of continuous activity after 2006; a religious association is then eligible to apply for the status of religious denomination if it has a membership of at least 0.1 percent of the population as counted in the most recent census (i.e., approximately 19,000 persons per the 2021 census). The law defines a religious association as an organization of at least 300 citizens who share and practice the same faith and has attained legal status through registration with the Registry of Religious Associations in the office of the clerk of the court where the main branch of the association is located. To register, religious associations must submit to the government their founding members’ personal data (e.g., names, addresses, personal identification numbers, and signatures), which the law says the government may not share with other public institutions or use in any other way. To operate as religious associations, organizations also require approval from the National Secretariat for Religious Denominations, which is under the authority of the Office of the Prime Minister. The law defines a religious group as a group of individuals sharing the same beliefs. Religious groups do not have to register to practice their religion, including in public, and do not need approval from the national secretariat to operate. Civil society associations engaged in religious activities function like secular associations and foundations; however, they do not receive the same benefits as religious denominations or religious associations. These associations do not require approval from the National Secretariat for Religious Denominations to operate. Their registration falls under the provisions of law governing the establishment of foundations, associations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which require a minimum membership of three individuals. Such civil society associations are not required to submit members’ personal data. Under the constitution, each of the country’s 18 recognized ethnic minorities, including Jews, who in some laws are categorized as an ethnic group and in others as a religious group, is entitled to a representative in the Chamber of Deputies. For a deputy to be elected, however, an organization is required, to receive votes equal to 5 percent of the national average number of votes cast by district and any citizen, regardless of religious affiliation, may vote for them. The list of organizations that benefit from these provisions is limited to those belonging to the National Council of Minorities, which consists of organizations already in parliament. Religious denominations are eligible for state financial and other support. They have the right to teach religion classes in public schools, receive government funds to build places of worship, pay clergy salaries partially with state funds, broadcast religious programming on radio and television, and apply for broadcasting licenses for their own stations. Under the law, the amount of state funding a denomination receives is determined by the number of adherents reported in the most recent census, as well as by “the religious denomination’s actual needs,” which the law does not define. Religious associations do not receive government funding and do not have the right to teach religion in public schools, but both they and religious denominations receive tax exemptions on income and buildings used for religious, educational, or other social purposes. Religious groups do not receive either government funding or tax exemptions. Both religious denominations and religious associations may own or rent property, publish or import religious literature, proselytise, establish and operate schools or hospitals, own cemeteries, and receive tax exemptions on income and buildings used for religious, educational, or other social purposes. Religious groups have no legal status to engage in such activities. Civil society associations engaged in religious activities may engage in religious worship and own cemeteries. While they do not receive the same tax exemptions or other benefits granted to religious denominations and religious associations, they may receive the tax advantages and other benefits accruing to civil society associations and foundations. Legal provisions allow local authorities to fund places of worship and theological schools belonging to religious denominations, including providing funding for staff salaries and building maintenance, renovation, and conservation or construction of places of worship. The government funds theological schools through the same mechanism available for other pre-university schools. No similar provisions exist for religious associations or other associations engaged in religious activities; however, these associations may receive funding through legal provisions for civil society associations and foundations. The law allows clergy from recognized religious denominations to minister to military personnel. Clergy may function within the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, Intelligence Service, Foreign Intelligence Service, Protection and Guard Service, Special Telecommunications Service, and General Directorate for Penitentiaries. Under various other arrangements, clergy of recognized religious denominations, and in some cases religious associations, may enter hospitals, orphanages, and retirement homes to undertake religious activities. Religious denominations and religious associations may undertake activities in penitentiaries, subject to approval by the institution’s director. The law forbids proselytizing in public and private schools. If teachers proselytise, the school management determines the appropriate disciplinary action based on the conclusions of an internal committee. The religion of a child who has turned 14 may not be changed without the child’s consent; after age 14, individuals have the right to choose their religion. The law allows religious workers from legally recognized religious organizations to enter and remain in the country under an extended-stay visa. Visa applicants must receive approval from the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs and submit evidence they represent religious organizations legally established in the country. The secretariat may extend such visas for up to five years. There is no quota or other limit on the total number of visas for foreign religious workers.

Key restriction tools imposed: different registration procedures exist for different categories of religious groups each of which also possess different benefits of registration, excessive informational requirements (including having to submit the personal data of members), longevity quota, membership quota (300 citizens), onerous registration procedures, vertical recognition (verticalism). As of year’s end, the government had not approved any applications for religious association status, compared with approving four such applications in 2022. As of year’s end, 44 entities were registered as religious associations. The religious association Assemblies of God – Romania reported that the government did not grant it religious denomination status despite submitting the required documentation in 2022. The State Secretariat for Religious Denomination reported the decision was delayed because repeated changes in the government impeded the required interagency process and Cabinet decision. Some small religious groups continued to state they viewed the 300-person membership requirement and the need to submit their founding members’ personal data for registration as a religious association as discriminatory because other types of associations required only three members and did not have to submit members’ personal data. They again criticized the three-tier classification system for religious organizations, particularly the minimum number of members required, pointing out that some denomination previously registered have fewer members. The government reported all military chaplains continued to be Romanian Orthodox priests, with the exceptions of one Roman Catholic priest and one pastor from the Evangelical Alliance. The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported several public hospitals rejected requests by Seventh-day Adventist employees to take a day off on Saturday. The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations continued to provide funding for cultural events organized by religious denominations and for publication of several books on the history and heritage of religious groups in the country.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (not free; subject to registration for propagational use); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; subject to registration); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (not free; subject to registration); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a reorganised recognition system that is based on horizontal recognition rather than vertical; establish a recognition agency that would manage the reorganised recognition system in a way that is independent of the government; ongoing discrimination and harassment against religious minorities should be resolved through more sophisticated means of religious education, mutual recognition of religion and belief, and government campaigns supporting diversity and religious pluralism; revoke the restriction tools identified in the current registration system.

Russian Federation

2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Russia is officially a secular state (the Russian Orthodox Church was disestablished in 1917 but is recognised today as the national church); however, the law recognises the “special role” of Russian Orthodox Christianity in the country’s “history and the formation and development of its spirituality and culture”; Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism are also recognised in law as the “traditional” religions of Russia; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2014.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of one’s “attitude to religion” was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2014.

Human rights instruments: Russia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Russia abstained from the UNDRIP; Russia did not vote on the UDHR; Russia is not party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Russian law mandates that all religious or belief organizations with a membership of ten people or more must register with the government to operate legally in Russia. The law creates three categories of religious associations with different levels of legal status and privileges: “religious groups,” “local religious organizations” (LROs), and “centralized religious organizations” (CROs). Religious groups or organizations may be subject to legal dissolution or deprivation of legal status by a court decision on grounds including violations of standards set forth in the constitution or protection of public security. A “religious group” is the most basic unit and does not require registration with the government. When a group first begins its activities, however, it must notify authorities, typically the regional ministry of justice, of the location of its activity, its rites and ceremonies, and its leader(s) and members. A religious group may conduct worship services and rituals and teach religion to its members with requisite notification to authorities. It does not have legal status or open property issues, invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, receive tax benefits, or conduct worship services in prisons, state-owned hospitals, or the armed forces. To hold services, a religious group may use property bought by its members for the group’s use, residential property owned or rented by its members, or public spaces rented by its members. A law that took effect in December 2022 expands the scope of the country’s foreign agent law, which previously required the government to show that an individual or organization had received financial or material assistance from a foreign source. According to some Russian scholars, the new law is vaguer than the previous law in the definition of a “foreign influence,” retaining foreign influence as “the provision of support by a foreign source to a person or influencing a person including by coercion, persuasion, or other means.” The law requires organizations falling under its coverage to publicly identify themselves as foreign agents, which critics say is intended to discredit them. An LRO may register with the Justice Ministry if it has at least 10 citizen members who are 18 or older and are permanently residing in the region where the LRO applies to register. LROs have legal status and may open bank accounts, own property, issue invitation letters to foreign guests, publish literature, receive tax benefits, and conduct worship services in prisons, hospitals, and the armed forces. CROs may register with the ministry at the regional or federal level by submitting at least three LROs of the same denomination. LROs and CROs may invite foreign citizens to carry out professional religious activities. LROs and CROs may produce, acquire, export, import, and distribute religious literature in printed, audio, or video format, as well as “other religious items.” By law, LROs and CROs may not participate in political campaigns or the activities of political parties or movements or provide material or other aid to political groups. This restriction applies to religious organizations but not to their individual members. To register as an LRO or CRO, an association must provide the following: a list of the organization’s founders and governing body with addresses and “internal passport” data (the mandatory identity document for all citizens older than the age of 14 residing in the country); the organization’s charter and minutes of the founding meeting; certification from the CRO (in the case of LROs); a description of the organization’s doctrine, practices, history, and attitudes toward family, marriage, and education; the organization’s legal address; a certificate of payment of government dues; and the charter or registration papers of the governing body in the case of organizations whose main offices are located abroad. Authorities may deny registration for reasons including incorrect paperwork, failure to meet administrative requirements, national security reasons, or placement on the list of extremist or terrorist organizations. Denial of registration may be appealed in court. By law, CROs and LROs receiving funding from abroad must report an account of their activities, a list of leaders, the source of foreign funding, and plans for how the organization intends to use the foreign funds or property obtained through foreign funding. Reports are annual by default, but the Justice Ministry may require additional ad hoc reports. The Expert Religious Studies Council, a committee established by the Ministry of Justice to advise it on religious groups, has wide powers to investigate religious organizations. Some of the council’s powers include reviewing organizations’ activities and literature and determining whether an organization is “extremist.” The law provides several examples of extremist activities, such as “incitement to violence,” but does not precisely define how organizations or religious materials may be classified as “extremist.” The council also advises the ministry on the issue of granting religious organizations status to a religious group. Foreign religious organizations (those created outside of the country under foreign laws) have the right to open offices for representational purposes, either independently or as part of religious organizations previously established in the country, but they may not form or found their own religious organizations in the country and may not operate houses of worship. The government (the Ministry of Justice or the Prosecutor General’s Office) oversees a religious organization’s compliance with the law and may review its financial and registration-related documents when conducting an inspection or investigation. With advance notice, the government may send representatives to attend a religious association’s events, conduct an annual review of compliance with the association’s mission statement on file with the government, and review its religious literature to decide whether the literature is extremist. The law contains ongoing reporting requirements on financial and economic activity, funding sources, and compliance with anti-terrorist and anti-extremist legislation. The government may obtain a court order to close those associations that do not comply with reporting or other legal requirements. The law allows the government to limit the places where prayer and public religious observance may be conducted without prior approval. LROs and CROs may conduct religious services and ceremonies without prior approval in buildings and facilities or on lands owned or rented by these associations, as well as in cemeteries, crematoria, places of pilgrimage, and living quarters. Baptism ceremonies in rivers and lakes, as well as services conducted in parks, open spaces, courtyards, do not require prior approval. In these cases, LROs and CROs must seek government approval at least one week in advance and provide the government with the names of organizers and participants, as well as copies of any written materials to be used at the event. A prime ministerial decree requires religious organizations to conform to specific counterterrorism measures to qualify for safety permits for their real property. Among other requirements, all facilities must be guarded during services by members of public organizations. A public organization is defined as a membership-based organization of individuals who associate on the basis of common interests and goals stipulated in the organization’s charter. Facilities with maximum building capacity between 50 and 100 persons must have “panic buttons” and video surveillance systems. Buildings with occupancy limits of more than 100 must be guarded by private security guards or National Guard personnel. Religious groups are responsible for defraying the costs of these measures. The penalty for noncompliance is a fine of up to 100,000 rubles (\$1,100). The Ministry of Defense chaplaincy program only allows for chaplains representing the four traditional religions, and the program requires members of a religious group to comprise at least 10 percent of a military unit before an official chaplain of that group is appointed. Chaplains are neither enlisted nor commissioned but are classified as assistants to the commander. Chaplains are full-time employees of the Ministry of Defense, paid from the defense budget. There are approximately 250 RoRB chaplains in the program. Federal law defines “missionary activity” as the sharing of one’s beliefs with persons of another faith or members with the aim of involving these individuals in the “structure” of the religious association. According to the law, to share beliefs outside of officially sanctioned sites (which include buildings owned by a religious organization, buildings whose owners have given permission for activities to take place, pilgrimage destinations, cemeteries and crematoria, and indoor spaces of educational organizations historically used for religious ceremonies), an individual must have a document from a religious group or registered organization authorizing him or her to share beliefs. The law explicitly prohibits sharing of any beliefs on another organization’s property without permission from that organization. It also prohibits missionary activity in residential buildings and the renting of any building from residential to nonresidential for the purpose of conducting religious activities. Ministers’ dissemination of missionary activities is marked with the name of the religious association providing the authorization. Violation of the law regulating missionary activity may be punished by a fine of 5,000 to 50,000 rubles (\$56 to \$560) for individuals and 100,000 to 1,000,000 rubles (\$1,120 to \$11,200) for legal entities, which includes LROs and CROs. Foreign citizens or stateless persons who violate restrictions on missionary activities may be fined 30,000 to 50,000 rubles (\$320 to \$560) and are subject to deportation. Within the Ministry of Justice, the Scientific Advisory Board reviews religious materials for extremism. Composed of academics and representatives of the four traditional religions, the board reviews materials referred to it by judicial or law enforcement authorities, private citizens, or organizations. If the board identifies material as extremist, it issues a nonbinding advisory opinion, which is then published on the ministry website and forwarded to the prosecutor’s office for further investigation. In addition to the Scientific Advisory Board, regional board experts also may review religious materials for extremist content. Prosecutors may present material to a court and petition the court to declare it extremist, but a court may, on its own accord, declare as extremist materials introduced during the consideration of administrative, civil, or criminal cases. By law, publications declared extremist by the federal authorities are automatically added to the federal list of extremist materials. Courts may order internet service providers to block access to websites containing materials included on the federal list of extremist materials. Courts review and reassess lists on a regular basis. If the courts determine the material is no longer “extremist,” the Justice Ministry is required to remove it from the lists within 30 days. Very rarely, in response to a legal challenge, courts may reverse a decision to designate material as extremist. The law makes it illegal to declare the key texts (holy books) of the four traditional religions in their “original languages” – Old and New Testaments of the Bible, Quran, and Tibetan Buddhist Kangyur (Kanjur) – to be extremist. The law does not define what constitutes an original language nor does it specify that foreign-language translations of these texts may not be declared extremist. A 2022 law facilitates the ability to produce, distribute, or possess with the aim of mass distribution of extremist materials by private individuals may result in 15 days’ imprisonment or a fine of 1,000 to 5,000 rubles (\$11 to \$53) or 2,000 to 5,000 rubles (\$22 to \$55) for public officials, as well as confiscation of these materials. Courts may suspend for 90 days the operations of legal entities found to be in possession of extremist materials and fine them 100,000 to 1,000,000 rubles (\$1,100 to \$11,200). Individuals who produce materials later deemed extremist must not be punished retroactively but must cease production and distribution of those materials. The law prohibits individuals suspected of financing terrorism, or whose actions have been a hindrance to the investigation of terrorism, from taking part in religious activities. The law also prohibits individuals suspected of financing terrorism, or whose actions have been a hindrance to the investigation of terrorism, from taking part in religious activities. Such personnel must take part in a course in “state-confessional relations in the Russian Federation” and be recertified by a CRO. The law allows the transfer of state and municipal property of religious significance to religious organizations, including land, buildings, and movable property. The law grants religious organizations using state historical property for religious purposes the right to use such property indefinitely. The law prohibits the transfer of living quarters for religious use and the use of living quarters for religious activity, unless the activity is a part of a “service, rite, or ceremony.” The law allows religious organizations to use buildings that were not originally authorized for religious purposes if they are used for the production, or possession with the aim of mass distribution, of extremist materials by private individuals. A group established on the property of a church or other religious institution that does not meet legal requirements is not brought into legal compliance by submitting prior paperwork by 2030, the law specifies if shall be demolished. The law states foreigners or stateless individuals whose presence in the country the government deems “undesirable” are forbidden from becoming founders, members, or active participants in the activities of religious organizations. The same is true for individuals whose activities are deemed extremist by the courts or who are subject to prosecution under the law on combating terrorism. The law restricts any foreign national or stateless person from entering the country if he or she “participates in the activities of the organizations included in the list of organizations and individuals in respect of whom there is information about their involvement in extremist activities or terrorism.” Foreigners engaging in religious work require a contract with a legally registered religious organization and a work visa. Religious work is not permitted on “humanities visas,” which allow foreigners to enter the country to strengthen academic or cultural ties or take part in charitable work. There are no missionary visas. The law grants religious organizations the exclusive right to manage pilgrimage activities.

Recognition policy: The Supreme Court has banned the activities of several religious organizations on the grounds of “extremism” and “terrorism,” including a regional branch of Falun Gong, Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars, Hizb ut-Tahrir (“Party of Liberation”), Nurdzhular (a Russification of the Turkish term “followers of Said Nursi”), Tablighi Jamaat, and the Fayzakhimani Islamic community. These organizations are on the Federal List of Extremist Organizations or the Federal List of Terrorist Organizations. Designations as extremist or terrorist organizations may be appealed in court. By law, officials may limit the activity of a religious association on grounds such as violating public order or engaging in “extremist activity.” The law criminalizes a broad spectrum of activities as extremist, including assistance to terrorism, but it does not precisely define extremism or require that an activity include an element of violence or hatred to be classified as extremist. Anti-extremism laws stipulate that speech or actions aimed at “inciting hatred or enmity” based on group affiliation (including religion) are punishable by administrative penalties for first-time offenses if the actions do not contain a criminal offense. These penalties include administrative arrests of up to 15 days and administrative fines of up to 20,000 rubles (\$220) for individuals and up to 500,000 rubles (\$5,600) for legal entities. Individuals are held in custody for 15 days without charge if they are charged with the criminal offense of “inciting hatred or enmity” based on group affiliation. Penalties include up to 15 days’ imprisonment or a fine of 1,000 to 5,000 rubles (\$11 to \$53) or 2,000 to 5,000 rubles (\$22 to \$55) for public officials, as well as compulsory labor for up to five years, and imprisonment for up to six years. Participating in or organizing the activity of a banned religious organization designated as extremist is punishable by a fine of up to 800,000 rubles (\$8,000) and imprisonment for a term of six to 10 years, with deprivation of the right to hold “certain positions” or engage in “certain activities” (not well specified but including a prohibition on running for public office) for up to 10 years and restrictions on freedom for a period of one to two years. These restrictions may include house arrest or constraints on travel within the country. For persons with “official status,” a term that applies to anyone working for the government or state-owned entities as well as to persons in management roles at commercial entities or NGOs, the prescribed prison term is seven to 12 years or a fine of up to 700,000 rubles (\$7,000). First-time offenders who willingly forsake their membership in banned religious organizations are exempt from criminal liability if they committed no other crimes as defined by the law. A law the State Duma passed in September in the first reading (of three) introduces liability for “public justification or propaganda of extremism.” The law defines the justification of extremism as “a public statement recognizing extremist ideology and practices as correct and in need of support and emulation.” The law defines “propaganda of extremism” as “the dissemination of information aimed at radicalizing a person to adopt an extremist ideology, convincing a person of its appeal, or convincing a person that it is permissible to carry out extremist activities.” This crime carries a fine of 100 to 300 thousand rubles (\$1,100 to \$3,300) or imprisonment for up to five years. Local laws in several administrative regions, including the republics of Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan, ban “extremist Islamic Wahhabism” but do not define the term. Authorities impose administrative or criminal penalties (the former entail a maximum sentence of 15 days in prison, while sentences for the latter may be much longer) for violating these laws, in accordance with federal legislation. By law, the government may designate an international religiously affiliated organization or foreign religious group “undesirable.” The designation allows the closure of foreign and international organizations on the grounds of representing a threat to the foundation of the constitutional order of the Russian Federation, the defense capability of the country or the security of the state. The designation may also be imposed on full-time for organization members. Religious organizations designated undesirable include seven Falun Gong-associated organizations (World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong, Coalition to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong in China, Global Mission to Rescue Persecuted Falun Gong Practitioners, Friends of Falun Gong, Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting, Dragon Springs Buddhist, and the European Falun Dafa Organization), the World Institute for Scientific and Technological Studies, and the New Generation Spiritual Directorate of the Evangelist Christians and the New Generation International Biblical College (from Ukraine). Since the country’s 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian authorities have labeled as undesirable the All-Ukrainian Spiritual Center Renaissance Religious Organization (in November 2022) and its charitable arm, the Transformation Center Church International (in June 2023). A law adopted in April distinguishes between citizens from birth and naturalized citizens. The law makes it possible for authorities to strip naturalized citizens of their citizenship if they participate in “actions that pose a threat to Russia’s national security,” including acts of extremism or terrorism or being part of an “undesirable organization.” The law criminalizes “offending the feelings of religious believers,” including atheists and followers of “nontraditional religions.” Actions in public demonstrating clear disrespect for society and committed with the intent to insult the feelings of religious believers” are subject to fines of up to 300,000 rubles (\$3,000), compulsory labor for up to one year, and imprisonment for up to one year. If these actions are committed in places of worship, the punishment may include a fine of up to 500,000 rubles (\$5,600), compulsory labor for up to three years, and a prison sentence of up to three years.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, broad grounds for deregistration and dissolution of groups is likely to be missed against groups unfavored by the state. Broad grounds for the denial of registration are also likely to be missed against unfavored groups, excessive informational requirements, many “basic religious activities” require registration to be conducted legally, membership quota, non-recognition for any religion or denomination other than the Russian Orthodox Church, preapproval, state definition of religion, state supervision, vertical registration is in effect (verticalism) in which there exists three separate categories of registered religious groups. Religious groups and human rights NGOs again reported authorities investigated, detained, arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and physically abused persons on account of their religious belief or affiliation. Authorities continued to accuse minority religious groups of extremism and terrorism. In January, the SOVA Center reported that the Ministry of Justice added the honorary representative of the Balal Lama in Russia – the Supreme Lama of Kalmyk, Telo Tulku Ripan (the Grin), Ambaydov) – to the register of individuals acting as a foreign agent. The stated reason for including him in the list was because he “spoke out against the special military operation in Ukraine and openly spoke in support of Ukraine.” In August, the government ordered the dissolution of the SOVA Center for Information Analysis, a Moscow-based human rights organization that focused on monitoring hate crimes, nationalism, xenophobia and racism, freedom of religion and belief, and anti-extremist legislation. Authorities contended they took this action because the SOVA Center was operating in areas of the country outside the jurisdiction where it was registered, the Moscow Region. The organization’s leaders subsequently created the SOVA Research Center (SOVA Center) to replace it.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarcy** (not free; subject to registration; prohibited for unfavored groups); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration, restricted); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration, restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration, restricted); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration; restricted).

Recommendations

Disenfranchisement of the present abuse of recognition and registration that are used roundly to restrict religious activity, establish a reorganised recognition system that is inclusive of all belief systems and their derivatives; remove state privilege for the Russian Orthodox Church, especially to disable its political power and its power to influence laws on religious groups; revoke restriction tools and related policies identified as part of this report that unjustly control religious activity.



Rwanda, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Rwanda is a secular state; theism is affirmed in all presidential, ministerial and military oaths.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2015.

Human rights instruments: Rwanda is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Rwanda was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Rwanda did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.



Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Rwandan law mandates that all religious or belief organisations must register with the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) to operate legally in the country. Under the law determining the organization and functioning of FBOs, which include religious groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) associated with religious groups, any organization, umbrella organization, or ministry that intends to begin operations must obtain legal status from the RGB. The law provides that a religious group or NGO must submit the following to obtain legal status: an application letter addressed to the RGB; notarized statutes governing its organization; the address of its head office and the names of its legal representative and deputy, their duties, full address, and criminal records; a document certifying the legal representative and deputy were appointed in accordance with its statutes; a brief notarized statement explaining its doctrine; a notarized declaration of the organization's legal representatives consent to the responsibilities assigned to them; notarized minutes of the group's general assembly that established the organization, approved its statutes, and appointed members of its organs; a notarized document describing the organization's annual action plan and source of funding; a document indicating the organization's building or meeting space meets the requirements of the building code of the area of operation; a letter issued by district authorities agreeing to collaborate with the organization; a partnership document issued by an umbrella organization of the organization's choosing; and proof of payment of a nonrefundable application fee. The law states the RGB must either issue a certificate of legal personality within 60 days of the date of receipt of the application or, in case of denial, send a written notice explaining the reasons for the denial within 30 days of the date of receipt of the application. Under the law, FBOs that held legal personality as of September 10, 2018, when the law was passed, are not required to reapply but have to harmonize their functioning and statutes with the revised law and submit the revised statutes to the RGB within 12 months of the law's enactment. Under the law, if the RGB denies a group's application for legal status, the group may reapply when the reason for denial no longer exists. The law regulates public meetings and states any person who holds a meeting or demonstration in a public place without prior authorization is subject to eight days' to six months' imprisonment, a fine of 100,000 to one million Rwandan francs (\$80 to \$800), or both. Penalties increase if the illegal meeting or demonstration is found to have threatened security, public order, or health. The law states religious sermons must be delivered in designated facilities that meet the requirements of the law, and an FBO intending to organize a special public gathering must seek authorization from the competent authority. Under the law, FBOs are prohibited from causing noise pollution. Offenders are subject to a fine of 100,000 to one million Rwandan francs (\$80 to \$800), and repeat offenders are subject to increased fines and up to one month's imprisonment. By law, groups may not use their faith, religious practices, or preaching to jeopardize national unity, peace and security, public order and health, good morals, good conduct, freedom, or the fundamental rights of others. Every foreign missionary must have a temporary resident permit and a foreign identity card. Specific requirements to obtain the permit (which is valid for two years and renewable) include a signed curriculum vitae, an original police clearance from the country of prior residence, an authorization letter from the parent organization, and a fee of 100,000 Rwandan francs (\$80).

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, excessive informational requirements are requested as part of registration procedures, fines and imprisonment for unauthorised public gatherings, restrictive qualifications are required for preachers and religious leaders. During the year the government continued to enforce requirements, imposed since 2018 related to basic infrastructure, health, safety, and noise pollution standards for houses of worship. During the initial enforcement of these requirements in 2018, authorities closed almost 9,000 places of worship, and more than 6,000 remained closed at year's end. Some groups that closed because they could not meet the infrastructure requirements consolidated to become larger and better resourced organizations that were better able to meet the standards. Some pastors lamented it was more difficult to maintain community cohesiveness with such expanded membership. Religious leaders said they acknowledged the importance of basic infrastructure (toilets, for example) for houses of worship, but that it was not appropriate for certain very specific requirements such as mandatory numbers of parking spaces or minimum sizes for plots of land to be applied in the same way in urban and rural contexts. The government continued to enforce a policy first announced in 2022 prohibiting mosques from announcing calls to prayer via loudspeaker in the morning on the grounds the loudspeakers contravened public noise ordinances. Government officials suggested the call to prayer could be delivered at a lower volume, consistent with ordinances, or via radio or other technological tools, reiterating noise ordinances equally applied to all activities, to include concerts, parties, and other social events, whether of a religious or nonreligious nature. There were reports the government consistently monitored the internal leadership affairs of religious organizations so it could intervene in their processes if they were poised to take any actions the government viewed as contrary to the country's laws, policies, or interests. Some religious leaders and members of religious communities, as well as many members of the public, said the government needed to prevent the formation of, or intervene in, organizations that were religious in name only, functioning as de facto schemes for charismatic, individual leaders to extract financial support from poor and sometimes less educated citizens, while providing no substantial social support or faith community. Independent religious groups continued to face difficulties establishing themselves because many requirements for obtaining official registration – for example, purchasing or renting property – were difficult to fulfill for groups that did not already have legal status or significant financial means.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (not free; subject to registration); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Repeal laws and policies unduly and inappropriately restricting reasonable religious activity; revoke the rule of mandatory registration; establish a revitalised recognition system that has capacities for both legal registration and existential recognition, provisions which should be extended to all belief systems, and offered at multiple levels of activity; to become Dynamic, the Rwandan government would need to establish a recognition agency that would manage the newly established recognition system independently from government (achieved by the government's relinquishment of its control of the agency following its establishment and its bestowal of state authority).

Saint Christopher and Nevis, Federation of

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Saint Kitts and Nevis is a secular state; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1983.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1983.

Human rights instruments: Saint Kitts and Nevis is party to the UNCRC; Saint Kitts and Nevis is neither party to the ICCPR nor the ICESCR; Saint Kitts and Nevis was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Saint Kitts and Nevis did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatory of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government in order to operate legally in Saint Kitts and Nevis. The Ministry of Ecclesiastical and Faith-based Affairs is responsible for registering religious groups. The registration process for religious groups is not yet standardized. Religious groups are not required to register but doing so provides the government with a database of contacts through which it disseminates information on government policy for religious groups. Registration can be processed through the registrar general and allows religious groups to act as charities and to import religious items duty-free. A religious organization can be formed with a minimum of two persons. According to enacted legislation, the evangelical community has legal standing and the right to own land. In June, the government announced the 2023 Rastafarian Rights Recognition Bill, which provided the Rastafarian community with legal rights to access medical cannabis, established tax concessions, and created a legal framework for registration. After Parliament approved the legislation, the Prime Minister, according to media reports, stated “We stand resolute in our decision to raise the level of equality and equity within our Federation and this is just one of the many steps forward in that direction as we continue to work towards becoming a sustainable island state... we must be mature enough to recognize that wrongs were done and we have the opportunity to correct some of those wrongs...I would like to apologize to the Rastafari community.”

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish procedures for existential recognition distinguished from those legal registration; develop all unstructured areas of the registration system.

Saint Lucia

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Saint Lucia is a secular state; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1978.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “creed” was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1978.

Human rights instruments: Saint Lucia is party to the UNCRC and the UNDRIP; Saint Lucia signed both the ICCPR and the ICESCR but has not ratified either; Saint Lucia did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: conditional mandatory registration – by law, religious or belief organisations cannot register with the government unless or until the group membership reaches 250 or more members and while unregistered organisations may operate, their religious leaders cannot legally officiate and register births, marriages or deaths which is a fundamental religious function. The Ministry of Equity, Social Justice and Empowerment is responsible for religious affairs and implements the government’s FBO policy. To register, groups must provide contact information, their establishment date and history, declaration of belief, number of members, location of meeting place, and income sources. FBOs are encouraged to seek incorporation as a bona fide nonprofit organization under the Companies Act. Registered groups are eligible to receive associated benefits. Unregistered groups may or may not have recognition status with the government. An unregistered group that submits a “notification of existence,” which includes identifying the group’s leadership, will receive correspondence acknowledging the group’s existence. After receiving the notification of existence, a group is then able to incorporate under the Companies Act. After incorporation, the entity becomes a legal person for taxation purposes including for land registration and deeds of sale. Registration costs 500 Eastern Caribbean dollars (\$185). After registration with the ministry and incorporation as a legal entity, a religious group may apply for concessions, including duty-free concessions on certain imported goods, departure tax and ticket tax waivers from the Saint Lucia Air and Sea Ports Authority, and exemption from work permits. Formal government registration also allows registered religious groups legally to register births, marriages, and deaths officiated by religious leaders. The government’s registration policy defines the process of obtaining work and labor permits for missionaries. Immigration authorities grant work permits for individuals entering the country to conduct missionary work in exchange for the payment of a weekly fee of 200 Eastern Caribbean dollars (\$74). Providing that they abide by the law, foreign missionaries face no other restrictions or obligations.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, excessive informational requirements are vulnerable to being misused against groups unfavoured by the state, registration costs \$190 which exceeds the \$100 threshold set by RoRB standards, the registration benefit of “legal marriage officiation” is impermissible to RoRB standards, foreign missionaries must pay a \$74-a-week fee to perform proselytising activities, according to some registered groups registration is not a guarantee of freedom to perform functions or to receive benefits promised by registration. A blasphemy law exists but is not enforced.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

To become Receptive, establish a revitalised recognition system that can provide both existential recognition in addition to legal registration simultaneously, to all belief systems and their derivatives, and at different levels of recognition; to become Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that has the capacity to manage the re-established recognition system in a way that is independent of the government; ongoing discrimination levied towards Rastafarians and Muslims are issues that should be resolved through greater religious education and mutual recognition; revoke excessive informational requirements and abolish the conditional mandatory registration order.



Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is a secular state; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1979.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “creed” was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1979.

Human rights instruments: Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – by law, religious or belief organisations are not required to register with the government to operate legally in the country. The constitution permits freedom of association, and there are no regulations regarding freedom to organize and worship. Religious organizations may, but are not required to, register as nonprofit religious institutions with the Ministry of Education, National Reconciliation, Ecclesiastical Affairs, and Information to qualify for tax exemptions. Religious organizations may also register as corporations, requiring an application to the same ministry and the issuance of a certificate of incorporation by parliament. According to government officials, there were 150 religious groups, with approximately 500 registered religious nonprofit organizations representing various denominations. Because registration requires financial reporting that some groups found onerous, many religious organizations did not register. During the year, the government registered three new religious groups. According to a government official, the government engaged regularly with representatives of existing registered religious groups to strengthen relationships with these groups. According to government officials, during the year, the Ministry of Education, National Reconciliation, Ecclesiastical Affairs, and Information regularly engaged with religious groups as part of the government’s outreach efforts and to maintain an up-to-date database of religious groups and marriage officers. The official stated it was challenging to keep track of smaller churches which may not report when they shut down. All religious groups were invited to participate in the National Day of Prayer event held in October.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a revitalised recognition system that bestows both existential recognition and legal registration, to all belief systems, and at multiple levels of operation; establish a recognition agency independent of government to manage the recognition system in order to be classified Dynamic.



Samoa, Independent State of



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Christianity is the state religion; the latest revised constitution from 2017 described Samoa as “a Christian nation founded on God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”; theism was affirmed in the same revised constitution.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2017.

Human rights instruments: Samoa is party to the ICCPR and the UNCRC; Samoa is not party to the ICESCR; Samoa abstained from voting on the UNDRIP but has since endorsed it; Samoa did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Samoan law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally. Religious groups have the option to register as a charitable trust or incorporated society with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Labor. Registration is free. Becoming a registered entity entitles groups to receive tax exemptions and legal status. Unregistered religious groups may not formally buy property or pay employees. Individuals or groups may establish a place of worship on community or private land but must obtain approval from the extended family that has claims to the land, as well as from the village council. The Congregational Christian Church strongly supported the amendment parliament enacted in August 2022 that rescinded the legal requirement that religious clergy pay income tax. Repeal had been an election promise by the ruling FAST Party. The government had not enforced the income tax requirement since assuming office in 2021. Villages tended to have one primary Christian church that village chiefs traditionally chose based on the denomination of their extended families. Many villages, however, such as Vaitele and Vailima, reportedly had multiple churches serving different denominations and coexisting peacefully. The Ministry of Police, Prisons, and Corrections Services continued to designate clergy from the Congregational Christian, Catholic, and Methodist Churches to act as voluntary chaplains on a rotational basis to provide prisoners with consistent access to spiritual guidance and counseling. Prisoners could also request access to counselors of other faiths. There continued to be reports that many public schools included Christian prayers in their daily routines. Public ceremonies typically began with a Christian prayer.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, non-recognition for any religion other than Christianity.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a revitalised recognition system that has the capacity for both existential recognition and legal registration bestowed nationwide, is offered to all belief systems and their derivatives and is bestowed at multiple levels of activity; revoke laws providing undue powers to village councils and the policy of the non-recognition of any religion other than Christianity; establish a recognition agency to manage the recognition system independent of government to become dynamic.

San Marino, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: San Marino is officially a secular state; however, the Roman Catholic Church receives exclusive privilege.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in a law from 1974.

Human rights instruments: San Marino is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; San Marino did not vote on the UDHR; San Marino is partied to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious or belief organisations are not required by law to register with the government in order to operate legally in San Marino. To obtain legal recognition, religious organizations are required to submit to the government evidence of nonprofit activities and annual reports, which include their budget, and the procedure required by the association for its approval. The government may periodically audit and inspect organizations, require them to submit additional documentation, and investigate any complaints from organization members or third parties. According to the most recent data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2022, 189 nonprofit organizations, the same number as in 2021, received contributions from taxpayers in accordance with the law. The government did not indicate how many of these organizations were religious, but among them were the Catholic Church, a number of Catholic associations, the Orthodox Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Baha'i Faith.

Recognition policy: a concordat signed in 1992 between the government and the Holy See provides that Catholic chaplains deliver spiritual assistance to hospital patients, retirement home residents, and prison inmates. A fund established under the concordat in 1993 and drawn from citizens' voluntary income tax allocations supports the Catholic Church's humanitarian, welfare, and social activities as well as the maintenance of religious sites. The law allows taxpayers to allocate 0.3 percent of their income tax payments to the Catholic Church or to other religious or secular groups recognized as nonprofit organizations. Taxpayers need not be members of a group to earmark a contribution. Religious organizations must be legally recognized in the country to receive this benefit. Catholic symbols remain common in government buildings, including schools and courtrooms. Crucifixes continued to hang on courtroom and government office walls. The government continues to maintain a public meditation and prayer site in the capital for use by worshippers of any religion.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, monitorial requirements are conducted "periodically" but RoRB standards state that such requirements should only be conducted at the highest frequency "annually".

Basic religious activities

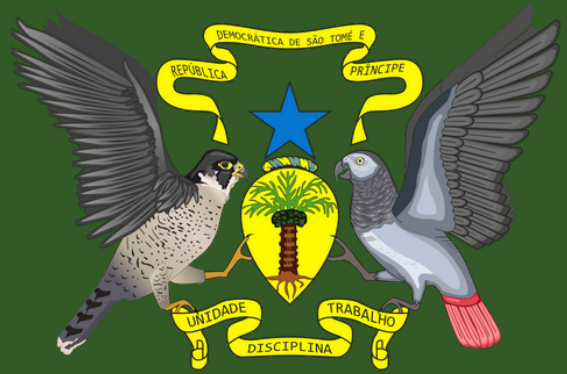
Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a revitalised recognition system that is able to bestow existential recognition and legal registration simultaneously as well as to all belief systems equally and at multiple levels of activity; establish a recognition agency that is independent of government to deal with the revitalised recognition system.



São Tomé and Príncipe, Democratic Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: São Tomé and Príncipe is a secular state.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2003.

Human rights instruments: São Tomé and Príncipe is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; São Tomé and Príncipe did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – by law, all religious or belief organisations must register with the government to operate legally in São Tomé and Príncipe. Religious groups must register with the government. If a religious group does not register, it is subject to fines and possible expulsion if it is a foreign religious group. To register, a group must send a letter requesting authorization to the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration, and Human Rights. Once the group obtains authorization, it must submit the following documents to a notary public: the ministry's approval letter; the group's statutes; the minutes or report from a meeting attended by at least 500 representatives of the group and signed by its president and secretary; copies of the national identity cards of those who attended this meeting; a list of board members; and a certificate from the registrar's office attesting that no existing organization has the same name. After a payment of 1,000 dobras (\$45) for notarial fees, an announcement is published in the government gazette, and the group may then operate fully as a registered group. Once registered, a religious group does not need to register again. Registered religious groups receive the same benefits, such as tax exemptions, as registered nonprofit organizations. According to the government, there are 33 registered religious groups in the country. During the year, the government did not receive any registration requests for new religious groups. Government officials stated that only two religious groups had ever been denied registration and that this was due to their practice of child marriage, which is illegal.

Recognition policy: in August 2023, the National Assembly approved a government agreement with the Holy See, which the President signed in September. At the end of the year, it remained pending the Holy See's ratification. The extensive agreement covers such matters as the status of Catholic Church properties, the right to build schools and conduct social services, the nontaxable nature of contributions to the church, and the right of the church to conduct legally recognized marriages.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, deportation of foreign nationals engaged in unregistered religious activities, excessive informational requirements (the national identity cards of at least 500 members), fines for those participation in activities organised by unregistered religious groups, membership and signature quota (at least 500 members who attended the group's launch meeting), nominal restriction, public objection restriction tool, secondary procedure is required to complete registration. Officials of the Seventh-day Adventist Church reported that recruitment exams for government jobs taking place on Saturdays conflicted with worship services, limiting possible job opportunities for church members.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (not free; subject to registration); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

To become Receptive, revoke present restrictive policies in the registration process such as retributions for unregistration, authorisation in preregistration, mandatory registration and membership quotas; also to achieve Receptive status, establish a revitalised recognition system that is able to bestow existential recognition and legal registration simultaneously as well as to all belief systems equally and at multiple levels of activity; to achieve Dynamic status, establish a recognition agency that is independent of government to deal with the revitalised recognition system.

Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: **Terminal**

FoRB Claim: No claim is made; no legal recognition or protection of freedom of religion was given in the revised Basic Law from 2013.



Secularity: Sunni Islam is the state denomination; Wahhabism is given special status by the government; the Quran and the Sunna are the constitution; non-Muslim foreigners must convert to Islam before they are eligible to naturalise.

Protections: No protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revision of the Basic Law from 2013.

Human rights instruments: Saudi Arabia is party to the UNCRC and the UNDRIP; Saudi Arabia is neither party to the ICCPR nor the ICESCR; Saudi Arabia abstained from voting on the UDHR.

Mandatory of registration: non-registration.

Registration policy: non-registration – there are no provisions in law for the registration of non-Islamic religious or belief organisations. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Call, and Guidance (MOIA) vets, employs, and supervises Sunni Muslim clerics. Those who preach at government-owned mosques are government employees who receive a monthly stipend. The ministry issues general guidelines by which all preachers must abide and directives to cover specific topics. The MOIA oversees clerics via video monitoring and spot inspections and is known to fire preachers who disobey or avoid instructions and sermon topics. The MOIA must approve clerics traveling abroad to proselytize, and those clerics operate under MOIA supervision while abroad. The stated purpose of this regulation is to limit the ability of religious scholars to travel or to preach overseas and to prevent the actual or apparent interference by clerics in the domestic affairs of other states. The press law requires all online newspapers and bloggers to obtain a license from the ministry. The law bans publishing anything “contradicting sharia, inciting disruption, serving foreign interests that contradict national interests, or damaging the reputation of the Grand Mufti, members of the Council of Senior Religious Scholars, or senior government officials.”

Recognition policy: the government requires noncitizen legal residents to carry an identity card, which among other descriptors, contains a religious designation of “Muslim” or “non-Muslim.” Some residency cards, including some issued during the year, indicated other religious designations, such as “Christian.”

Key restriction tools imposed: any non-Islamic religious public expressions or activities are strictly prohibited, hypervertical recognition system is in place, Islamic new religious movements are also likely to face prohibitions of their activities, non-recognition for any non-Sunni religion or denomination, the missionary work of clerics must be approved and supervised by the MOIA, non-citizen legal residents are required to carry an identity card that displays either their religious affiliation or simply the designations “Muslim” or “non-Muslim”. The government continued to prohibit the public practice of any non-Islamic religion. In practice, there was increased but still limited tolerance of private, non-Islamic religious gatherings and public displays of non-Islamic religious symbols, and religious practitioners at variance with the government-promoted form of Sunni Islam remained vulnerable to detention, harassment, and, for noncitizens, deportation. The counterterrorism law criminalizes, among other things, “calling for atheist thought in any form or calling into question the fundamentals of the Islamic religion.” It criminalizes “anyone who challenges, either directly or indirectly, the religion or justice of the King or Crown Prince.” The law also bans publications that “contradict the provisions of Islamic law,” and other acts including non-Islamic public worship, public display of non-Islamic religious symbols, conversion by a Muslim to another religion, and proselytizing by a non-Muslim. The law permits death as punishment for blasphemy against Islam. Courts have not sentenced individuals to death for blasphemy since 1992. Punishments for blasphemy may include lengthy prison sentences. Criticism of Islam, including expression deemed offensive to Muslims, is forbidden by law on the grounds of preserving social stability. The Basic Law requires the state to protect human rights in accordance with sharia. The Human Rights Commission (HRC), a government entity, is tasked with protecting, enhancing, and ensuring implementation of international human rights standards “in light of the provisions of sharia,” and is tasked to follow up on citizen complaints. There are no formal requirements regarding the composition of the HRC. During the year, the commission had 18 voting board members from various parts of the country. The law criminalizes the publication or downloading of offensive sites, and authorities routinely blocked sites containing material perceived as harmful, illegal, offensive, or anti-Islamic. Social media users who post or share content considered to attack religion face imprisonment for up to five years under the Cyber Crimes Law. Those found guilty of distributing content online deemed to disrupt public order, public morals, or religious values may also be subject to a fine up to three million riyals (\$800,000).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; illegal to convert from Islam; being Muslim is intertwined with citizenship); **hierarcy** (not free; non-Islamic materials are illegal for propagational use); **monasticism** (not free; illegal); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; illegal); **pastoral services** (not free; illegal); **private expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **proselytism** (not free; non-Islamic forms are illegal); **public expression and observance** (not free; non-Islamic expression is illegal); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; non-Islamic instruction illegal); **religious literature** (not free; distribution of non-Islamic literature illegal); **religious and worship services** (not free; non-Islamic services highly restricted); **religious trade** (not free; non-Islamic forms illegal).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the present apparatus of laws persecuting non-Muslims and non-Islamic religious activity; establish a recognition system that is inclusive of all belief systems and is able to provide both existential recognition and legal registration; revoke the present hegemony of the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam that not only subjugates non-Wahhabi forms of Islam as well as all non-Islamic belief systems.

Senegal, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Senegal is a secular state; theism is affirmed in the presidential oath.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Human rights instruments: Senegal is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Senegal did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatory registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – Senegalese law requires all religious or belief organisations to register with the Ministry of Interior and to gain subsequent authorisation from the Ministry of Women, Family, Gender, and Child Protection to operate legally in the country. By law, all faith-based organizations, including religious groups and NGOs representing religious groups, must register with the Ministry of Interior to acquire legal status as associations. To register, organizations must provide documentation showing they have existed for at least two years; a mission statement; bylaws; a list of goals, objectives, activities, or projects implemented; and proof of previous and future funding. They must also pass a background check. Registration enables a group to conduct business, own property, establish a bank account, receive financial contributions from private sources, and receive applicable tax exemptions. There is no formal penalty for failure to register other than ineligibility to receive these benefits. Registered religious groups and nonprofit organizations are exempt from taxation on donations received. The law requires associations, including religious groups and NGOs affiliated with them, to obtain authorization from the Ministry of Women, Family, Gender, and Child Protection to operate. The legal registration requirement allows the government to monitor organizations engaged in social development and to identify any programs these organizations implement to ensure they operate according to the terms of their registration. Foreign NGOs, including those affiliated with religious groups, must also obtain authorization from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To maintain their authorization, each association and domestic and foreign NGOs must submit an annual report, including a financial report, and activity reports every three months, which the ministries use to monitor for irregularities and potential threats against national security. In addition, all NGOs must also be part of the government-NGO Strategic Partnership Council, set to be chaired by the Prime Minister but which had not begun operations by year's end.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, dual registration (with both the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Women, Family, Gender and Child Protection; for foreign groups, there is a third registration procedure with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs required), excessive informational requirements (proof of funding) are intertwined with a longevity quota (at least two years), secondary and tertiary procedures, there is an ad hoc system for state funding, monitoring. The government continued to provide direct financial and material assistance to religious groups for use primarily in maintaining or rehabilitating Islamic and Christian places of worship and related infrastructure or for underwriting special events. Government assistance funded a highway to the Mouride Sufi holy city of Touba and a road linking a new conference center to the Great Mosque in Kaolack, as well as support for prominent religious events, such as the Sufi Grand Magal pilgrimage to Touba in September, the Sufi Gamou celebration in Tivaouane in October, Hajj pilgrimages for Muslims, and Catholic pilgrimages to the Holy Land and Rome. There continued to be no formal procedure for applying for assistance. All major religious groups continued to have access to the funds and competed for them on an ad hoc basis. President Sall occasionally visited and supported beneficiaries of the funds, particularly on the eve of Islamic religious celebrations.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

To attain Receptive status, revoke two-step and three-step authorisations for religious groups and foreign religious groups; also, dissolve the implementation of any longevity quotas; also to attain Receptive status, establish a revitalised recognition system that has within provisions for both existential recognition and legal registration, is inclusive of all belief systems, and can be apply recognition and registration at multiple levels of activity and operation; to attain Dynamic status, establish a recognition agency that is independent of government to manage the recognition system.



Serbia, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Serbia is officially a secular state (the Serbian Orthodox Church was disestablished in 1920); however, the Serbian Orthodox Church receives exclusive privileges as the national church; the law also identifies the Roman Catholic Church, Evangelical Christian Church, Islamic community, Jewish community, Reformed Christian Church, Serbian Orthodox Church, and Slovak Evangelical Church as “traditional” religions and are given special treatment by the state.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2006.

Human rights instruments: Serbia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Serbia did not vote on the UDHR; Serbia is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Serbian law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations must register in order to legally conduct activities fundamental to religious observance. Although the law does not require religious groups to register, but it treats unregistered religious organizations as informal groups that do not receive any of the legal benefits afforded registered religious groups. Only registered religious groups may build new places of worship, own property, apply for property restitution, or receive state funding for their activities. Registration is also required to open bank accounts and hire staff. Registered clerics of registered groups are entitled to government support for social and health insurance and a retirement plan. According to government sources, approximately 2,400 persons from 19 registered churches or religious communities used these benefits, which account for approximately 30 percent of the budget of the Directorate for Cooperation with Churches and Religious Communities of the Ministry of Justice. The law also exempts registered groups from property and administrative taxes and from filing annual financial reports. To obtain registration, a religious group must submit the names, identity numbers, copies of notarised identity documents, and signatures of at least 100 citizen members; its statutes and a summary of its religious teachings, ceremonies, religious goals, and basic activities; and information on its sources of funding. The law prohibits registration if an applicant group's name includes part of the name of an existing registered group. The Ministry of Justice maintains the Register of Churches and Religious Communities and responds to registration applications. If the Ministry of Justice rejects a registration application, the religious group may appeal the decision in court. There are 26 “nontraditional” religious groups registered with the government, the same number as in 2022, including Christian groups, Buddhists, and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Several of these organizations are umbrella groups that oversee many individual churches, sometimes of slightly differing affiliations. According to the constitution, the Constitutional Court may ban a religious community for activities infringing on the right to life or health, the rights of the child, the right to personal and family integrity, public safety, and public order, or if it incites religious, national, or racial intolerance. The constitution also states the Constitutional Court may ban associations that incite religious hatred. The Directorate for Cooperation with Churches and Religious Communities manages all matters pertaining to the cooperation of the state with churches and religious communities. These include assistance to national minorities in protecting the religious traditions integral to their cultural and ethnic identity, cooperation between the state and SOC dioceses abroad, support for religious education, and support for and protection of the legal standing of churches and religious organizations. The Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue is tasked with combating misperception and hate, including against religious communities, through organizing roundtables, discussions, and other forms of dialogue, public messaging, and assessing related legislation.

Recognition policy: the law grants special treatment to seven religious groups the government defines as “traditional.” These are the SOC, Roman Catholic Church, Slovak Evangelical Church, Reformed Christian Church, Evangelical Christian Church, Jewish community, and Islamic community. The Islamic community is divided between the Islamic Community of Serbia, with its seat in Belgrade, and the Islamic Community in Serbia, with its seat in the city of Novi Pazar, in the southwest Sandzak region. Both Islamic communities are registered with the government and may conduct most normal business, such as receiving financial assistance from the government, receiving health-care and pension benefits for clergy, maintaining tax-exempt status, holding bank accounts, owning property, and employing staff. Neither group, however, has absolute authority over matters regarding the entire Islamic community. Under the law, “church” is a term reserved for Christian religious groups, while the term “religious community” refers to non-Christian groups and to some Christian entities. The seven traditional religious groups recognized by law are automatically included in the Register of Churches and Religious Communities. In addition to these groups, the government grants traditional status, solely in Vojvodina Province, to the Diocese of Dacia Felix of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which has its seat in Romania and an administrative seat in the city of Vrsac, in Vojvodina. The law also grants the seven traditional religious groups, but not other registered religious groups, the right to receive value-added tax refunds on all purchases enumerated under law and to provide chaplain services to military personnel. The constitution states parents and legal guardians shall have the right to ensure the religious education of their children in conformity with their own convictions. The law provides for religious education in public schools, and students in primary and secondary schools must attend either religious or secular civic education class. Parents choose which option is appropriate for their child. Religious education is available only for members of the seven traditional churches/religious communities. Smaller “nontraditional” religions are generally not covered in school curriculums. All children are required to complete secular primary school. Parents may request to homeschool their children and may do so if their school administration approves the request. Parents can further educate their children in religious schools, at home, or within churches and religious communities in addition to their secular primary school education. Students can attend religious schools for secondary school and beyond without restriction. The curriculum taught in the religion classes varies regionally, reflecting the number of adherents of a given religion in a specific community. The Ministry of Education (MOE) requires a minimum of 15 students for a school to offer any elective course, including religion classes. The ministry can approve a group with smaller numbers of students at the request of the relevant school administration. The ministry typically approves these requests, although it requires the class be composed of at least five students. When individual schools do not meet the above minimum number, the ministry attempts to combine students into regional classes for religious instruction. According to the ministry, 477,985 students in elementary and high schools attended religious education classes during the 2023–24 school year. There were approximately 1,800 religious teachers in the education system.

Key restriction tools imposed: automatic registration for groups belonging to recognised religions, excessive informational requirements, legislation implies that unregistered religious groups are mandated to provide the government with annual financial reports to remain legal, nominal restriction, signature quota, weaponisation of the term “traditional” to exclude new religious movements and minority religions. In June, the government granted 472 million dinars (\$4.4 million) to the SOC for completion of the Temple of St. Sava in Belgrade. On September 14, the government granted a further 531 million dinars (\$5 million) to the SOC for construction of the Temple of St. Sava in Belgrade, and to the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Timisoara (Romania), the Diocese of Buda in Szentendre (Hungary), and Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Western Europe in Paris (France). Representatives of some churches and religious communities and civil society said the funding was an example of the government’s preferential treatment of the SOC. The country’s military did not provide chaplains or chaplain services for members of nontraditional or unregistered religious groups. The two Islamic organizations remained divided since their separation in 2007. In January 2021, the Islamic Community of Serbia, which has its seat in Belgrade and was registered in 2006, filed a lawsuit against the government before the European Court of Human Rights for its 2007 decision to register the separate Islamic Community in Serbia, with its seat in Novi Pazar. This lawsuit remained in progress at year’s end. The Islamic Community of Serbia stated the Islamic Community in Serbia’s name was too closely linked to its own and therefore, per its interpretation of the law, should not have been registered. In late 2022, a leadership dispute emerged within the Islamic Community of Serbia between Sandzak-based leaders on one side and Belgrade-based leaders on the other. The origin of the conflict was not clear, but both parties claimed that the other had exercised authority contrary to regulations and the decisions of the community’s bodies and institutions. The Ministry of Justice stated it was unable to proceed with registering Alkhanbari as the legal representative of the Federation of Jewish Communities because of a pending legal case pertaining to the 2018 election of Igor Ginzberg as the federation’s president. Continued disagreements within the Jewish community regarding the legal leader of the federation hampered implementation of the Holocaust-era Heilless and Unclaimed Property Law, and the federation failed to make its legally obligated annual payments to the country’s Holocaust survivors. In December, the federation voted to appoint a working body to manage its affairs for a one-year period, temporarily resolving the impasse that had disrupted the federation’s operations. The government did not explicitly provide support for travel as religious reasons, such as Hajj and Umrah travel for Muslims and government-sponsored travel to Rome or the Middle East for Christians. The funds the Directorate for Cooperation with Churches and Religious Communities allocated to religious communities, however, could be used for such purposes. The national television service, Radio Television of Serbia, continued to broadcast a daily, 10-minute Religious Calendar program regarding the teachings, history, and spiritual and material heritage of the major monotheistic religions.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Dismantle the present system that adopts partial recognition; establish a revitalised recognition system that bestows existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives; establish a recognition agency that manages this recognition system in a way that is independent of the government’s control; reduce the intrusiveness of informational requirements.

Seychelles, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Seychelles is a secular state; through separate acts of incorporation, the government recognises the Anglican Church, the Baha'i Faith, Roman Catholic Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church and three Islamic groups (including the Quran and Sunnah Society of Seychelles, Islamic Society of Seychelles, and Islamic Foundation of Seychelles); theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2017.

Protections: Implicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2017.

Human rights instruments: Seychelles is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Seychelles was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Seychelles did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although the law in Seychelles does not explicitly mandate that religious or belief organisations must register with the government to operate legally in the country, clergy from unregistered religious groups may not provide spiritual counsel to members in prison which is a basic religious function. Although no penalties are prescribed for unregistered groups, only those registered as corporate bodies or associations have legal status and certain rights, such as to have airtime for religious programming on the national broadcast media, Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation (SBC), or permission to provide spiritual counsel in prison and interact with government. In 2022, the government amended the Registration Act to introduce new criteria for registering heads of religious groups and to establish mechanisms to detect financial fraud, terrorist financing, and money laundering through religious groups. The amendment requires all associations, including religious associations, to submit new documentation and financial returns by July 31 each year, maintain up-to-date registries of their membership, and retain their financial records for seven years. It also requires the Registrar of Associations to maintain a publicly available list of all registered associations, including religious ones. The law prohibits religious groups from obtaining commercial radio or television licenses. The SBC provides airtime to registered religious groups on national radio and on national television for a daily early morning program and to broadcast religious services upon request. The SBC's policy grants equal access to radio and television programming for all registered faith-based groups. Religious groups may publish newspapers and magazines.

Key restriction tools imposed: broadcasting is made a registration benefit despite being a basic religious activity whose free conduct should not need to be dependent upon a group having gained registered status, excessive informational requirements, membership quota (7 members), preapproval, secondary procedure as part of the registration process. In November, the Financial Intelligence Unit launched an awareness campaign to encourage all associations to register under the Beneficial Ownership Act. The government stated the 2022 amendment to the Registration Act improved its transparency and put it in compliance with the 2020 Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act. SIFCO members said while they supported the amendment out of concern that without tighter regulations, fraudulent religious groups could too easily register as associations, they felt the requirements were too cumbersome. SIFCO members continued to express concern that the relatively large number of registered religious groups (currently more than 100) in a country with a small population was a sign of division. SIFCO also continued to express concern about the registration process itself, by which some religions were registered as corporate bodies and others as associations, with differing requirements for registration. The SBC continued to broadcast religious programming for holidays such as Christmas, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and the feast of the Immaculate Conception. The SBC also continued to broadcast 90-minute Catholic and Anglican services weekly on the radio and provided airtime for short television programs on its channels to all other groups for prayer services, including regular Friday prayers for Muslims. The SBC continued to review and approve all religious programming to ensure hate speech was not broadcast. Other religious programming consisted of 15-minute prerecorded prayers by Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i, Seventh-day Adventist, Catholic, and Anglican groups every two weeks. Faith-based groups seeking to broadcast on the SBC were required to produce their own content, but few did so. Private radio and television stations did not feature religious programs. Various religious groups stated they continued to engage with prison authorities to carry out spiritual and religious activities in prisons.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (free); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (free); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; broadcasting is subject to government preapproval); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (free); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Opportunities to gain existential recognition must be expanded to all belief systems and religions and their respective communities; resolve some of the identified persistent issues within the present system; to become classified Receptive, establish a reorganised recognition system that bestows existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives; to become classified Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that manages this recognition system in a way that is independent of the government's control.

Sierra Leone, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Sierra Leone is a secular state; theism is affirmed in the presidential oath.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2008.

Human rights instruments: Sierra Leone is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Sierra Leone did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Sierra Leonean law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally in the country. The Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW) is responsible for religious activities, including registering religious organizations. Groups seeking to register must submit the required forms to the ministry, together with proof of police clearance, evidence of funding, a list of donors and other organizations they work with, and annual work plans to qualify for tax exemptions and duty concessions. The registration must be renewed annually. There is no penalty for organizations that choose not to register, but registration is required to obtain tax exemptions and waivers when importing religious materials. According to government regulations, religious organizations intending to engage in charitable activities must establish a separate unit to carry out such functions and register that entity as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) with the Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organizations. Religious groups may also register with the Inter-Religious Council, the umbrella NGO responsible for interreligious affairs in the country.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, annual reregistration to maintain registered status and its benefits, a secondary procedure is part of the registration process. The MSW did not provide funding it promised in 2020 to finalize the code of conduct drafted that year by the IRCSL to regulate religious bodies and how they work together, according to IRCSL secretary general Jesse Fornah. Fornah said one reason the IRCSL wanted the code of conduct was its concern about the proximity of churches to mosques which led in the past to religious disputes, especially when a new church or mosque was erected near an existing religious structure of the other faith. The proposal remained in the deliberative stage at year's end. IRCSL vice president Sheikh Alhaji Murtala said the IRCSL asked the MSW director of social and religious affairs in March to help mediate a continuing land dispute that began in 2022 when a Pentecostal group was given land adjacent to a mosque to build a church. Although the IRCSL intervened in the dispute initially, Murtala said the IRCSL since determined that the matter was out of its purview and consequently urged the national government to get involved to continue the mediation.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

To be classified Receptive, establish differentiated provisions for existential recognition and legal registration by reorganising the present recognition system so that it has the capacity to make such provisions; to be classified Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that is independent of government control to manage the recognition system; revoke the secondary procedure in the registration process and the annual reregistration order.



Singapore, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Singapore is a secular state; the government recognises the Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Human rights instruments: Singapore is party to the UNCRC and the UNDRIP; Singapore is neither party to the ICCPR nor the ICESCR; Singapore did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.



Registration policy: conditional mandatory registration – Singaporean law mandates that all religious or belief organisations with a membership higher than ten adults must register with the government. The law requires all associations of 10 or more persons, including religious groups, to register with the government. Registration confers legal identity, which allows registered groups to own property, hold public meetings, and conduct financial transactions. Registered religious groups may apply to establish and maintain charitable and humanitarian institutions, which enables them to solicit and receive funding and tax benefits, such as income tax exemptions. Registered societies are subject to potential deregistration by the government on a variety of grounds, such as having purposes prejudicial to public peace, welfare, or good order. Deregistration makes it impossible to maintain a legal identity as a religious group, with consequences related to owning property, conducting financial transactions, and holding public meetings. A person who acts as a member of or attends a meeting of an unregistered group may be punished with a fine of up to 5,000 SGD (\$3,800), imprisonment of up to three years, or both. Prisoners, including those in solitary confinement, are allowed access to chaplains of registered religious groups. Members of unregistered or banned religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, the Unification Church, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Christian Conference of Asia, and the South Korea-based Shincheonji Church, do not have this right. Citizens must obtain a permit prior to speaking at indoor gatherings open to the public if the topic refers to race or religion, and such events are only permitted if outside of the hearing or view of nonparticipants. Indoor, private (invitation-only) events are not subject to the same restrictions. Organizers of private events, however, must prevent inadvertent access by uninvited guests or they may be cited for noncompliance with the rules regarding public gatherings. By law the government may prohibit publications that are considered objectionable because they describe, depict, express, or deal with matters of race or religion (among other things) in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to cause feelings of enmity, hatred, ill will, or hostility among racial or religious groups. The government may prohibit the importation of publications, including religious publications, under the law. For offenses involving the publication of material deemed objectionable, an individual may be subject upon conviction to a fine not exceeding 5,000 SGD (\$3,800), imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or both. A person in possession of a prohibited publication may be fined up to 2,000 SGD (\$1,500) and imprisoned for up to 12 months for a first conviction. The government prohibits all written materials published by the International Bible Students Association and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, the publishing arms of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Ministry of National Development and the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) establish guidelines on land development and use of space for religious activities. The URA regulates all land usage and decides where organizations may be located; a religious group seeking a new place of worship must apply to the URA for a permit. URA guidelines regulate the use of commercially and industrially zoned space for religious activities and religious groups; they apply equally to all religious groups.

Recognition policy: the government maintains a decades-long ban on Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church. The government banned Jehovah's Witnesses in 1972 on grounds the religion was prejudicial to public welfare and order because the group objected to serving in the military, reciting the national pledge, or singing the national anthem. A 1996 decision by the Singapore Appeals Court upheld the ban and stated that individuals (including Jehovah's Witnesses) have the right to profess, practice, and propagate their own beliefs but may not act as members of an unlawful society or attend meetings of such banned groups. In practice, the government does not arrest members of Jehovah's Witnesses for attending or holding meetings in private homes but does not allow them to hold public meetings or publish or import their literature. The government banned the Unification Church in 1982 on grounds it was a "cult" that could have detrimental effects on society. The law authorizes the Minister of Home Affairs to issue a "restraining order" against persons of authority within a religious group who cause feelings of enmity or hostility between different religious groups, promote political causes, carry out subversive activities, or encourage disaffection against the government under the guise of practicing religion. A restraining order places various restrictions on public activities in which a religious authority can participate. The Minister of Home Affairs may issue a restraining order against a religious organization if there is any foreign influence in the group that undermines religious harmony in the country. Subjects of a restraining order must also remove any online content deemed offensive. Only citizens or permanent residents may fill key leadership roles in religious organizations, and religious organizations must disclose foreign donations of 10,000 Singapore dollars (SGD) (\$7,600) or more and disclose any affiliation to foreign groups that may be able to exert influence on the organization. The country has two advisory groups on topics related to religious freedom, the Presidential Council for Religious Harmony (PCRH) and the Presidential Council for Minority Rights (PCMR). The PCRH reports on matters affecting the maintenance of religious harmony and considers cases referred by the Ministry of Home Affairs or Parliament due to concerns the case could cause religious tensions. The President appoints the PCRH's 10 members, seven of whom represent the Buddhist, Catholic, Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, Sikh, and Taoist communities and three, including the chair, who do not represent any religious group. The PCMR acts within the legislative process and examines all legislation to ensure it does not disadvantage specific religious or racial groups. The PCMR also considers and reports on matters concerning any religious or racial group that Parliament or other government entity refers to it. The constitution states Malays are "the indigenous people of Singapore" and requires the government to protect and promote their interests, including religious interests. The Islamic Religious Council (MUIS), a statutory board established under the Ministry of Culture, Community, and Youth (MCCY), administers affairs for all Muslims in the country and protects their interests, including for Sunnis and minority groups, such as Shia. MUIS further advises the president on matters relating to the practice of Islam in the country. The government appoints all members of the MUIS. The government also appoints the members of the Hindu Endowments Board, Hindu Advisory Board, and Sikh Advisory Board. These councils under the MCCY manage various aspects of their faith communities, mainly practiced by the Indian minority. The law allows members of the Muslim community, irrespective of their school of Islam or ethnicity, to have personal status issues governed by Islamic law "as varied where applicable by Malay custom." Ordinarily the Shafi'i school of law is used, but other accepted schools of Islamic law may be used as appropriate. The President appoints the president of the sharia court. A breach of a sharia court order is a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment of up to six months. Sharia courts have exclusive jurisdiction over marriage issues where both parties are Muslims or were married under Muslim law. Sharia courts have concurrent jurisdiction with secular courts over disputes related to custody of minors and disposition of property upon divorce. Sharia courts do not have jurisdiction over personal protection orders or applications for maintenance payments. Appeals within the sharia system go to an appeals board, the ruling of which is final and may not be appealed to any other court. The law allows Muslim men to practice polygamy, but the Registry of Muslim Marriages may refuse requests to marry additional wives after soliciting the views of existing wives, reviewing the husband's financial capability, and evaluating his ability to treat the wives and families fairly and equitably. By law, the President appoints a "male Muslim of good character and suitable attainments" as the Registrar of Muslim Marriages. According to Singapore's sixth report to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, "polygamous marriages are rare in Singapore and have steadily decreased from 0.7 per cent in 2010 to 0.18 per cent of Muslim marriages in 2020." Under the law, certain criminal offenses apply only to those who profess Islam. This includes publicly teaching or expounding any doctrine relating to Islam in a manner contrary to Islamic law, which carries a maximum fine of 2,000 SGD (\$1,500), maximum imprisonment of 12 months, or both. It is also a criminal offense for Muslims to cohabit outside of marriage, but there has been no report of the government enforcing that law in decades. According to legal experts, Islamic law governs Muslims in the context of inheritance issues by default, but under certain circumstances, civil law takes precedence when invoked. Islamic law may result in a man receiving twice the share of a woman's inheritance of the same family relational level. Under Islamic law, a man may also incur financial responsibilities for his female next of kin, although this provision is not codified in the country's secular law. The government may detain individuals considered security threats, including those expressing religious motivations, under internal security laws and regulations. The individuals receive religious, psychological, and social rehabilitation through state and civil society groups, including the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG). All groups, including the RRG, must concur that a detainee is successfully rehabilitated before authorities can approve a release.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, broads grounds for which deregistration may occur could easily be misused against religious groups unfavoured by the state, fines (up to \$3,800) and imprisonment (up to 3 years) for those attending or leading unregistered groups, possibly inverted membership quota, prohibition of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church, state definition of religion, stringent restrictions on religious literature. The official website of the Jehovah's Witnesses reported that, as of December, 11 Jehovah's Witnesses were being held in the armed forces' detention facility for refusing on religious grounds to complete national service, compared with 14 members held the previous year. In July, media outlets reported that authorities charged a 65-year-old man under the Administration of Muslim Law Act for teaching a "deviant doctrine" and for operating an Islamic school without registration. MUIS filed a police report against the man in 2021. Authorities had previously presented the case to the Fatwa Committee, a panel of prominent Islamic scholars, which ruled that some of the man's teachings had no basis in Islamic sources and ordered him to stop such teachings. The government continued to assist religious groups locate spaces for religious observance in public housing, where most citizens reside. The government continued to enforce the maintenance of ethnic ratios in public housing to avoid the emergence of ethnic and religious enclaves in concentrated geographic areas. While there is no specific law prohibiting proselytization, the government continued to limit its practice through the broader application of laws regarding limits on public speech, assembly, and broadcasting; authorities cited concerns that proselytizing by one group might offend other religious groups and upset intergroup relations.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; conversion to prohibited religions is illegal); hierarchy (not free; subject to registration); monasticism (not free; subject to registration); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; restricted); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; subject to registration; also restricted by law); public expression and observance (not free; subject to registration); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (not free; subject to registration; restricted); religious literature (not free; restricted); religious and worship services (not free; subject to registration; restricted); religious trade (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the present apparatus of laws restricting religious activity must take place for Singapore to rise to Restrictive status; also, crucially, reverse of all religious prohibitions (e.g. those imposed against Jehovah's Witnesses); restrictions and the use of subjective language in the legislation as a means for restriction would need to be revoked in order for the country to rise to Receptive status; restrictions on religious literature and the fines and imprisonment imposed for unregistered groups must also be abolished; establish a reorganised recognition system that extends both existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives equally.

Slovak Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Slovakia is officially a secular state; however, the Roman Catholic Church receives exclusive privileges as the only denomination to have established a bilateral cooperation agreement with the government.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2017.

Human rights instruments: Slovakia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Slovakia did not vote on the UDHR; Slovakia is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.



Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Slovakian law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally, ministers of unregistered religious groups do not have the right to provide spiritual counsel in prisons and state-run hospitals. The law requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of Culture's Department of Church Affairs to employ spiritual leaders to perform officially recognized functions. Clergy from unregistered religious groups do not have the right to minister to their members in prisons or government hospitals. Civil functions such as weddings officiated by clergy from registered groups are recognized by the state, while those presided over by clergy from unregistered groups are not, and these couples must undergo an additional civil ceremony. Unregistered groups may apply to provide spiritual guidance to their adherents in prisons, but they have no legal recourse if their requests are denied. Unregistered groups may conduct religious services, which the government recognizes as private, rather than religious, activities. Unregistered groups lack legal status and may not establish religious schools or receive government funding. The law exempts registered groups from the duty to notify public authorities in advance of organizing public assemblies but does not allow this exemption for unregistered groups. Under the law, organizations seeking registration as religious groups must have a minimum of 50,000 adherents. The 50,000 adherents must be adult citizens with permanent residence in the country and must submit to the Ministry of Culture an "honest declaration" attesting to their membership, knowledge of the articles of faith and basic tenets of the religion, personal identity numbers and home addresses of all members, and support for the group's registration. All groups registered before these requirements came into effect in 2017 remained registered without having to meet the 50,000-adherent requirement; no new religious groups have attained recognition under the revised requirements. According to the law, only groups that register using the title "church" in their official name may call themselves a church; there is no other legal distinction between registered "churches" and other registered religious groups. The 18 registered religious groups are: the Apostolic Church, Baha'i Community, The Brotherhood Unity of Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Church of the Brethren, Czechoslovak Hussite Church, Church of Jesus Christ, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, Evangelical Methodist Church, Greek Catholic Church, Christian Congregations, Jehovah's Witnesses, New Apostolic Church, Orthodox Church, Reformed Christian Church, Roman Catholic Church, Old Catholic Church, and Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities. Registered groups receive annual state subsidies. All but the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, Greek Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Reformed Christian Church, and Roman Catholic Church have fewer than 50,000 members, but they registered before this requirement came into effect. The Department of Church Affairs oversees relations between religious groups and the state and manages the distribution of state subsidies to religious groups and associations. The ministry may not legally intervene in the internal affairs of religious groups or direct their activities. Under the law, state subsidies to registered groups are based on the number of adherents reported in the most recent census. The state adjusts these annual subsidy payments based on inflation. A group lacking the 50,000 adult adherents required to obtain status as an official religious group may register as a civic association, which provides the legal status necessary to carry out activities such as maintaining a bank account, entering into a contract, or acquiring or renting property. In doing so, however, the group may not identify itself officially as a religious group, since the law governing registration of civic associations specifically excludes religious groups from obtaining this status. The group must also refrain from carrying out activities related to practicing religion, which from a legal perspective are reserved for registered groups only, such as teaching religion at schools or providing spiritual services; violators face possible dissolution by authorities. To register as a civic association, three citizens must provide their names and addresses and the name, goals, organizational structure, executive bodies, and budgetary rules of the group. The law requires public broadcasters to allocate program time for registered religious groups but not for unregistered groups.

Recognition policy: a concordat with the Holy See provides the legal framework for relations between the government, the Roman Catholic Church in the country, and the Holy See. Four corollaries cover the operation of Catholic religious schools, the teaching of Catholic religious education as a subject in public schools, the service of Catholic priests as military chaplains and police, and the exercise of conscientious objections. A single agreement between the government and 11 of the 17 other registered religious groups provides similar status to those groups. The 11 religious groups may also provide military chaplains. The unanimous approval of all existing parties to the agreement is required for other religious groups to obtain similar benefits.

Key restriction tools imposed: alternative procedures to register as a civic association are provided but still with membership quota imposed and with a lesser degree of registered status bestowed, amalgamation, membership quota, nationality quota, nominal restriction, no new religious groups have successfully completed registration since the enactment of the 2017 law on religious groups, preferential treatment of preregistered groups, signature quota, unregistered religious groups are not able to conduct some pastoral activities which are classified as "basic religious activities", vertical registration system due to there existing registered religious groups, registered civic associations, and unregistered groups. In a separate trial, the Specialized Criminal Court in Banská Bystrica in November found Skrabak guilty of producing and possessing extremist material and sentenced him to a three-year suspended sentence. When justifying the suspended sentence, the court determined that the materials Skrabak had produced and possessed only carried the logo of the Slovak Togetherness association and not the logo of the banned Slovak Togetherness political party. The court also found Skrabak not guilty of the third criminal charge, disseminating extremist materials, because the judge determined that the symbols on items he had disseminated, such as a black sun and runes, were not unquestionably extremist. Also in January 2023, the Old Catholic Mission petitioned Caputova to challenge legal provisions that require an organization to have a minimum of 50,000 adult adherents to register as a religious group at the Constitutional Court, citing a 2022 statement by the Slovak National Center for Human Rights saying the provisions were in breach of the constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights. The group announced in March that in her formal response to its request, the President agreed the registration requirements were "unreasonably high," but decided not to submit a motion to the Constitutional Court. Caputova stated the court had not changed its position on the issue since ruling in 2010 that the constitution ensured fundamental rights and freedoms of members of both registered and unregistered religious groups equally and that lawmakers were entitled to set a registration threshold. In March 2023, parliament failed to pass a law enabling registration of religious groups with fewer than 50,000 adherents. Some MPs who opposed the law argued it would allow "obscure dangerous sects" and Muslims to operate and would help "destroy and weaken" Christianity in the country. Submitted by the former government plenipotentiary for freedom of religion or belief Anna Zaborska and several other coalition MPs, the draft law proposed to create a new, lesser registration category of religious association that would provide smaller groups with a legal status but no other rights belonging to legacy religious groups. Representatives of unregistered groups criticized the draft law for providing them with an inferior status, similar to the one they already had, and for not addressing the problems they faced. In April, the Supreme Administrative Court ruled against the Grace Christian Fellowship's appeal of the Bratislava Regional Court's 2020 decision that dismissed the group's legal action contesting the Ministry of Culture's 2018 decision to reject its 2007 registration application. In its decision, which could not be appealed, the Supreme Administrative Court validated the ministry's third and final refusal to register the group and the ministry's finding that it promoted hatred toward other religious groups. Representatives of the Muslim community continued to state that Muslims faced increasing difficulties in finding suitable burial grounds for their adherents, since a cemetery they had used for these purposes in Bratislava was close to reaching its maximum capacity and the city council had not provided a new suitable location that would allow funeral services and burial according to Islamic traditions. Although the community had registered as a civic association, it continued to state that the lack of recognition as a religious group made it difficult to obtain the necessary construction permits for establishing a mosque or other sites for religious worship, such as prayer rooms. The group said officials in the past had cited technical grounds, such as zoning regulations, to reject their applications or fail to act on them. In June, the mayor of Bratislava, Matus Vallo, met for the first time since assuming office in 2018 with representatives of the Muslim community to discuss their grievances, including hate crimes against the community, inability to establish a mosque, and issues with burial grounds. During the meeting, Vallo stated that Bratislava, home to the country's largest Muslim community, must be a city for all and expressed a commitment to supporting all vulnerable communities. The government allocated approximately €57.6 million (\$63.4 million) in annual state subsidies to the 18 registered religious groups, compared with €52.8 million (\$58.1 million) in 2022 and €52 million (\$57.2 million) in 2021. As in prior years, up to 80 percent of each group's subsidy was used to pay the group's clergy and operating costs. Some members of religious groups continued to state their groups' reliance on direct government funding, which constituted approximately 50 percent of their income, limited their independence and religious freedom. They said religious groups self-censored potential criticism of the government on sensitive topics to avoid jeopardizing their relationship with the state and, consequently, their finances.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); laws on importation for propagational use remain unclear; monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (not free; restricted); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (not free; subject to registration); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (not free; restricted); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the apparatus of laws restricting religious activity, including all the above identified restriction tools; to be classified Receptive, establish differentiated provisions for existential recognition and legal registration by reorganising the present recognition system so that it has the capacity to make such provisions; to be classified Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that is independent of government to manage the recognition system.

Slovenia, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Slovenia is a secular state.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Human rights instruments: Slovenia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Slovenia did not vote on the UDHR; Slovenia is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.



Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Slovenian law does not explicitly mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally, clergy from unregistered religious organisations are not permitted to provide spiritual counsel to members in the military, police, prisons, hospitals, and social care institutions which is a basic religious function. The law enables churches and other religious groups to register with the government to obtain status as officially recognized religious entities, but it does not restrict the religious activities of unregistered religious groups. Unregistered religious groups may establish legal associations or entities to purchase property but are required to pay taxes on such property, whereas property owned by registered religious groups used for religious purposes is exempt from taxation. According to the law, the rights of registered and unregistered religious groups include autonomy in selecting their legal form and constituency, freedom to define their internal organization and to name and define the competencies of their employees, autonomy in defining the rights and obligations of their members, latitude to participate in interconfessional organizations within the country or abroad, and freedom to construct buildings for religious purposes. Registered religious groups may provide religious services to the military, police, prisons, hospitals, and social care institutions. Registered religious groups are also eligible for rebates on value-added taxes and government cofinancing of social security contributions for their religious workers. The law states religious groups have a responsibility to respect the constitution and the legal provisions on nondiscrimination. To register with the government, a religious group must submit an application to the Ministry of Culture (MOC) providing proof it has at least 10 adult members who are citizens or permanent residents; the name of the group, which must be clearly distinguishable from the names of other religious groups; the group's address in the country; and a copy of its official seal to be used in legal transactions. It must pay an administrative tax of €22.60 (\$25). The group must also provide the names of the group's representatives in the country, a description of the foundations of the group's religious beliefs, and a copy of its organizational act. If a group wishes to apply for government cofinancing of social security for clergy members, it must show it has at least 1,000 lay members for every clergy member. On 20th September 2023, the National Assembly adopted amendments to the Religious Freedom Act, increasing the statutory level of state coverage of social security contributions for religious employees from 48 to 60 percent of the average salary. However, it also canceled the previous government's 2022 decree, which provided 100 percent coverage of contributions for employees of "religious organizations with the status of a generally beneficial organization to society," a status belonging only to the largest religious communities. Smaller communities were not affected by the 2022 decree. The government said it canceled the 2022 decree because the decree conflicted with existing legislation. The government may refuse the registration of a religious group only if the group does not provide the required application materials in full or if the MOC determines the group is a "hate group" – an organization engaging in hate crimes as defined by the penal code. By law, the MOC monitors and maintains records on registered religious communities and provides legal expertise and assistance to religious organizations. The MOC establishes and manages procedures for registration, issues documents related to the legal status of registered communities, distributes funds allocated in the government's budget for religious activities, organizes discussions and gatherings of religious communities to address religious freedom concerns, and provides information to religious groups on legal provisions and regulations related to their activities. Charitable organizations connected with a religious community are unable automatically to participate in public tenders. Such organizations must first prove their status as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to the government and then formally request consideration, as must NGOs that are not connected with religious groups.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, broad grounds for the denial of registration are vulnerable to being misused against religious groups unfavoured by the state, excessive informational requirements, membership quota (two different kinds are imposed for different aspects of the registration process; the lower status demands 10 adult members while the higher status demands 1,000), nationality quota, onerous registration procedure. The government registered two new religious groups during the year: Hare Krishna skupnost Damo-dar and the Old Catholic Church in Slovenia (Utrecht Union). This brought the total number of registered religious groups to 59, the largest of which were the Catholic Church, Islamic Community, Serbian Orthodox Church, and Evangelical Church. Another registered organization, the Slovene Muslim Community, also continued to represent Muslims in the country. Some minority religious communities said they continued to experience difficulties providing spiritual care to their members in the military, hospitals, prisons, and other public institutions. While many hospitals had Catholic chapels, members of other faiths had fewer opportunities to attend religious services while hospitalized. Other faiths shared multireligious prayer rooms in hospitals and prisons. This, as well as staffing limits, created fewer prayer opportunities for members of other religious groups while hospitalized or incarcerated. The Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) employed full-time Catholic and Protestant clergy to provide religious services, but no imams, Orthodox priests, or rabbis. Muslim community leaders said the Ministry of Defense continued to not employ an imam in the SAF, despite their requests it do so. The Ministry of Defense stated it could not hire an imam due to staffing issues, with recruitment focused on meeting NATO commitments. Catholic officials suspended a previous request to employ a bishop in the SAF due to a lack of priests. Some minority religious groups said there was no provision to provide state insurance support to dependents of religious workers. In addition, according to the Religious Freedom Act, state financial assistance for priests without a full employment relationship with their church was limited to "priests who have at least a secondary education and religious workers who have vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience," which excluded married religious workers. Larger religious organizations that had the status of "generally beneficial organizations" protested the September 20 repeal of the 2022 decree which paid 100 percent of social security contributions for members of those organizations. Those larger religious organizations impacted by the government's rollback of these benefits stated that the government was taking away acquired rights and that it had failed to consult the religious organizations when the National Assembly was developing and drafting the new legislation. However, smaller religious organizations, which had not benefited from the 2022 law, welcomed the repeal of the provision, since it was replaced by a new amendment that increased coverage of social security contributions from 40 to 60 percent for all religious workers, regardless of the size of their respective organizations. The Islamic Community continued to provide certificates to companies producing meat from stunned animals affirming the meat as halal. The Jewish community remained concerned about the law requiring stunning prior to slaughtering, stating this violated kosher laws, and it continued to import kosher meat from neighboring countries. The government defended the law as necessary to comply with EU regulations to prevent unnecessary suffering to animals. The MOC and leaders of the Muslim and Jewish communities said that as a result of continuing confusion regarding the legal status of circumcision due to the Commission on Medical Ethics' opinion, many public hospitals did not offer the procedure. As a result, Muslims and Jews continued to rely on private hospitals or traveled to Austria for the procedure.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish separate procedures for existential recognition and legal registration; resolve identified restriction tools such as excessive informational requirements, membership quota among others; to be classified Dynamic, establish a recognition agency to manage the recognition system and its provisions for recognition and registration; this recognition agency should operate independently of the government.

Solomon Islands

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Solomon Islands is officially a secular state; however, Christianity is given special treatment by the government; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2018.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “creed” was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2018.

Human rights instruments: Solomon Islands is party to the ICESCR and the UNCRC; Solomon Islands is not party to the ICCPR; Solomon Islands was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Solomon Islands did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatory of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – by law, all religious or belief organisations must register with the government to operate legally in the Solomon Islands. Religious groups must apply in writing to the Registrar of Companies for a certificate of registration. Religious groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) may register as charitable organizations. To register, a group must submit the required documentation to the Registrar of Companies; the application fee of 1,250 Solomon Islands dollars (SBD) (\$160) is waived for religious groups. Documentation required for the application process includes a description of the group, a list of board members, and a constitution that states how the group is governed and how members are chosen. The registrar issues a certificate when satisfied that the requirements have been met and that the nature, extent, objectives, and circumstances of the applicant are noncommercial. The Ministry of Traditional Governance, Peace, and Ecclesiastical Affairs (MTGPEA) delivers ecclesiastical programs in partnership with faith-based organizations, engages with religious leaders to support peace initiatives, and manages government grants to churches. Members of minority faiths continued to express concern that most citizens, who are predominantly Christian and Protestant, would likely support any efforts to declare the country a Christian nation.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation. Government officials said proposed constitutional amendments, first introduced in 2017, to declare the nation a Christian country, were not advancing at the end of the year. On December 19, parliament passed the Constitutional Amendment Bill 2023 that contained provisions for repealing the 1978 constitution and replacing it with a new constitution. The Constitutional Amendment Bill established a Constituent Assembly charged with considering and recommending a draft constitution to parliament for passage. If parliament, in acting on an affirmative recommendation from the Constituent Assembly, passes the bill, the terms of the new constitution will immediately replace the existing constitution in its entirety. As of year's end, the provisions of a new constitution under the bill were not yet public. Members of minority faiths expressed some concern over any possible provisions of the proposed new constitution that would declare the nation a Christian country, and the likelihood that most citizens, who are predominantly Christian and Protestant, would support such provisions. Multiple religious groups, including Christian, Jewish, and Islamic groups, were registered in the country. Government sources stated there were no pending registration applications for other groups. Officials stated some religious groups were able to register as NGOs or charities without being required to reveal any religious affiliation, which the groups hoped might offer more freedom to operate. The Ministry of Home Affairs and the MTGPEA continued to interact with religious groups. The Ministry of Home Affairs characterized its role as maintaining a balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free expression, and maintaining public order. The MTGPEA provided funding to churches to carry out social programs, such as a Christian care center for victims of domestic violence administered by the Anglican Church of Melanesia, and for the maintenance of church buildings. The government subsidized most of the schools and health centers administered by the Catholic Church, Anglican Church of Melanesia, United Methodist Church, South Seas Evangelical Church, and Seventh-day Adventist Church. It allocated these subsidies proportionally based on the number of students at the schools and the size of the health centers. The government customarily continued to use the Bible to administer oaths of office, but this was not compulsory. The Prime Minister included Bible verses in most of his public speeches and parliamentary addresses.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (not free; subject to registration); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish provisions for existential recognition distinct from legal registration by reorganising the recognition system; revoke the rule of mandatory registration; to be classified Receptive, establish a recognition agency to manage the recognition system independently of the government.



Somalia, Federal Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

ForRB Claim: Partial claim is made that excludes the propagation of any religion other than Islam.

Secularity: Sunni Islam is the state denomination; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2012.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2012.

Human rights instruments: Somalia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Somalia was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Somalia did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: malregistration.

Registration policy: malregistration – guidance on how to register or what is required is inconsistent and the government has no ability to implement registration law outside Mogadishu. The federal Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA) has legal authority to register religious groups. However, the government of Puntland in March 2024 declared it no longer recognised the Somali federal government. Guidance on how to register or what is required is inconsistent. Somaliland has no mechanism to register religious organizations and no specific requirements to do so. Other FMS administrations have no mechanism to register religious organizations. MERA is responsible for monitoring religious affairs and promoting religious tolerance between practitioners of Islam and members of designated minority religious groups. Specific responsibilities of the ministry include arranging travel and accommodation for Somali Hajj pilgrims. The ministry is also responsible for developing messaging to counter al-Shabaab ideology. It has the mandate to regulate religious instruction throughout the country. The federal government supported the travel of 9,043 Hajj pilgrims to Saudi Arabia during the year.

Recognition policy: the PFC requires the president, but not other office holders, to be Muslim.

Key restriction tools imposed: criminalisation of blasphemy and religious conversion away from Islam, informational about registration procedures is inconsistent and the government does not have the authority to provide genuine registered status, non-recognition of any religion or denomination other than Sunni Islam. While the PFC does not explicitly prohibit Muslims from converting to other religions, sharia is interpreted in the country to forbid conversion from Islam. Under the law, no exemptions from the application of sharia legal principles exist for non-Muslims. The federal and FMS governments maintained bans on the propagation of religions other than Islam. The federal government reportedly continued to loosely enforce the registration requirement for religious groups opening schools for lay or religious instruction. According to several advocacy groups working in the region, in early October, the Somaliland Supreme Court heard the second appeal in the case of a Somaliland resident sentenced in 2022 to five years in prison after being convicted of blasphemy, apostasy, insulting Islam and the Prophet of Islam on social media, and spreading Christianity. The Supreme Court ruled the accused should remain in prison for at least two more months, with no guarantee that she would be released at that time. According to her lawyer, the appellate regional court of Marodi Jeh denied her first appeal in December 2022. After the individual declared a return to Islam, the court conditionally released her in August, subject to reimprisonment should she be found practicing Christianity or communicating with Christians. There was no further information available about her case before the end of the year.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; illegal to convert from Islam); **hieronymy** (not free; restricted or illegal); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **proselytism** (not free; illegal to propagate any religion other than Islam); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the present apparatus of terminally restrictive laws on religious activity including the repressive penal code that criminalises blasphemy and conversion from Islam; establish provisions for recognition and registration and make these available to all belief systems and their derivatives; establish this recognition system in a way that does not place Islam above all other belief systems and groups.

South Africa, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: South Africa is a secular state; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2012.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2012.

Human rights instruments: South Africa is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; South Africa abstained from voting on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.



Registration policy: stipulatory registration – South African law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally in the country. The law does not require religious groups to register; however, registered religious and other nonprofit groups may qualify as public benefit organizations, allowing them to open bank accounts and exempting them from paying income tax. To register as a public benefit organization, groups must submit to the relevant provincial social development office a nonprofit organization application, including their constitution, contact information, list of officers, and documentation stating they meet a number of prescribed requirements that largely ensure accounting and tax compliance. A group registers once with the local office and its status then applies nationwide. Once registered, the group must submit annual reports on any changes to this information, important achievements and meetings, and financial information, as well as an accountant's report. The constitution grants detained persons visitation rights with their chosen religious counselor.

Recognition policy: the law recognizes civil marriage, customary marriage, and civil unions (including same-sex unions). Civil law does not allow polygamy. The law allows for polygamous marriages to be conducted under customary law; however, it applies only to "those customs and usages traditionally observed among the Indigenous African people." Customary marriages must be registered within three months of the ceremony at any office of the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) or through a designated traditional leader in areas where there is no DHA office. Muslim and Hindu marriages are registered as customary marriages. "Authorized marriage officers" at some churches are permitted to "solemnize a marriage," provided they complete a marriage certificate with signatures from two witnesses and submit the certificate to DHA.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation. Throughout the year, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities (CRL) examined allegations of sexual abuse, "cult-like" practices, and financial malfeasance against leaders of various religious organizations in what it stated was a continued effort to protect congregants from abuse and fraud. At year's end, the trial of Bishop Zondo of the Rivers of Living Waters Ministries on 10 counts of rape and other charges was ongoing in the Pretoria High Court. In 2022, the CRL held public hearings on allegations of abuses alleged to have taken place at the Rivers of Living Waters Ministries. Although the court did not use as evidence the representations made during the CRL hearings, the hearings brought to public attention abuses that the CRL stated were taking place in church. In November, the National Assembly passed a 2016 CRL legislative proposal that would require religious groups to register formally with the government and would create a peer review council, consisting of representatives from various religious groups, that would grant organizations and individual religious leaders permission to operate. At year's end, the President had not signed the measure into law. Several groups, including the Southern Africa Catholic Bishops' Conference, Freedom of Religion South Africa (FORSA), and the International Institute for Religious Freedom, opposed the proposal, saying the registration requirement would restrict their religious freedom. The Muslim Marriages bill, proposed by the Law Reform Commission, remained under discussion in the National Assembly at year's end. The bill, intended to "rationalize marriage laws pertaining to various types of marriages," including customary marriages and polygamous marriages, would regulate recognition, solemnization, and registration, as well as provide for the designation of marriage officers. It would recognize existing marriages concluded under civil or customary law, "as well as marriages concluded in line with sharia law and other religious belief or practices." In 2022, the Constitutional Court confirmed a Supreme Court of Appeal ruling that legally recognized Muslim marriages and declared sections of the separate Marriage and Divorce Acts unconstitutional. FORSA stated the Muslim Marriages bill should include a clause that expressly protected religious marriage officers and/or the religious institutions they represented from being compelled to solemnize any marriage that offended or violated their beliefs.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

A lack of distinction between procedures for registering religious and secular entities needs to be resolved through the differentiation of procedures for these two types of entities.

South Sudan, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: South Sudan is officially a secular state; however, Christianity receives special treatment; theism was affirmed in the constitution.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “religious creed” was affirmed in the transitional constitution from 2022 effective through February 2025.

Human rights instruments: South Sudan is party to the UNCRC and in 2024 became a party to the ICCPR; South Sudan is not party to the ICESCR; South Sudan was absent during voting on UNDRIP; South Sudan did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory and malregistration.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the law mandates that religious or belief organisations must register with the government to operate legally in South Sudan. Religious organisations register with the state government where they intend to operate. Religious groups with associated advocacy and humanitarian or development organizations must also register with the Ministry for Humanitarian Affairs through the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. Faith-based organizations are required to provide copies of their constitution, a statement of faith documenting their doctrines, beliefs, objectives, and holy books; a list of executive members; and a registration fee of 3,500 South Sudan pounds (\$3). All humanitarian organizations, including faith-based ones, must pay this fee. These requirements, however, are not strictly enforced, and many faith-based groups operate without registration. International faith-based organizations are required also to provide a copy of any previous registration with another government and a letter from the international organization commissioning its activities in that country. The transitional constitution specifies that the regulation of religious matters within each state is the executive and legislative responsibility of the state government. It establishes the responsibility of government at all levels to protect monuments and places of religious importance from destruction or desecration. The transitional constitution allows religious groups to establish and maintain what the transitional constitution deems “appropriate” faith-based charitable or humanitarian institutions.

Malregistration – the ongoing violence in South Sudan along ethnic lines that has resulted in attacks on churches and other places of worship undermines the registration laws meant to protect religious communities.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, secondary procedure, more qualifications required for GFOs than domestic groups which creates a discriminatory system (GFOs are required to provide proof of their successful registration with another government and a commissioning letter from the group’s international headquarters), unregistered groups often go without registration despite registration being mandatory. Former Deputy Interior Minister Salva Mathok, a member of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly, died abroad in March. In 2022, he had ordered local youth to burn a Seventh-day Adventist church in Gogrial East County, Warrap State. Mathok said that the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine was destroying traditional and cultural norms within the community. Following the incident, Mathok declined calls from Seventh-day Adventist leaders to apologize and instead made public statements in the press justifying his actions, calling the Seventh-day Adventist church a “house of prostitution,” and claiming the church was abducting women and girls from the community. The government took no further action during the year with regard to the incident. After Mathok’s death, his remains were received with honor by transitional government leaders at the Juba airport, and the governor of Warrap State declared three days of mourning. Leaders from all major religious groups attended ceremonial public events that typically featured opening prayers and readings by both Christian and Muslim clergy. Christian leaders with the South Sudan Council of Churches and Muslim leaders with the South Sudan Islamic Council (SSIC) participated in key implementation bodies for the peace agreement signed in 2018, such as the National Transitional Committee. Religious leaders continued to say they generally had good access to transitional government officials and that their relationship with authorities remained broadly positive. Religious leaders also said they had freedom to criticize government policy, especially in their sermons when key political leaders attended church services. Both Christian and Islamic prayers, delivered in English and Arabic, opened most official events. Religious leaders continued to express concern the breakdown in law and order increased the risk of harm to all entities operating in the country. Government officials included both Christians and Muslims. President Kiir, a Catholic, employed Sheikh Juma Saeed Ali, a leader of the country’s Muslim community, as a high-level advisor on religious affairs. Vice President Hussein Abdelbagi is also a Muslim.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (not free; subject to registration); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish a reorganised recognition system that can bestow both existential recognition and legal registration simultaneously and one that offers these to all belief systems equally; reduce the excessive registration fee presently imposed; revoke secondary procedures in the registration process and halt the request for more qualifications for GFOs in comparison to domestic groups.

Spain, Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Spain is officially a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1978); however, the Roman Catholic Church receives preferential treatment and was the only denomination to be mentioned in the latest revised constitution from 2011.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2011.

Human rights instruments: Spain is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Spain did not vote on the UDHR; Spain is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Spain law does not explicitly mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government, unregistered religious groups are not legally able to rent property for hosting worship services. The government does not require religious groups to register, but registration confers on religious groups certain legal benefits. Groups registered in the Registry of Religious Entities maintained by the Office of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of the Presidency, Relations with Parliament, and Democratic Memory (Ministry of the Presidency) may buy, rent, and sell property, and may act as a legal entity in civil proceedings. Registration entails completing forms available on the ministry's website and providing notarized documentation of the foundational and operational statutes of the religious group, its legal representatives, territorial scope, religious purposes, and address. All persons or groups have the right to practice their religion regardless of whether the community of which they are members is registered as a religious entity. New religious communities may register directly with the Ministry of the Presidency, or religious associations may register on their behalf. If the Office of Religious Affairs deems an applicant for registration a nonreligious group, the applicant may instead be included in the Register of Associations maintained by the Ministry of the Interior. Inclusion in the associations register grants legal status but confers no other benefits. Registration itself simply lists the association and its history in the government's database. Registration as an association is a precursor to requesting that the government deem the association to be of public benefit, which affords the same tax benefits as charities, including exemption from income tax and taxes on contributions. For such a classification, the association must be registered for two years and maintain a net positive fiscal balance. Military rules and cooperation agreements with the government allow religious military funerals and chaplain services for Catholics, Muslims, Protestants, and Jews, should the family of the deceased request them. Other religious groups may conduct religious military funerals upon request. Religious groups must apply to local governments for a license to open a place of worship or other establishments intended for public use. Requirements may vary from municipality to municipality, except in the autonomous communities of Catalonia and País Vasco, which have specific regulations for license requirements. The documentation required to apply for a license is usually the same as for other business establishments seeking to open a venue for public use and includes information such as architectural plans and maximum capacity. Religious groups must also inform the Office of Religious Affairs after opening new places of worship. Local governments are obligated to consider requests for use of public land to open a place of worship. If a municipality decides to deny such a request after weighing factors such as availability and value added to the community, the city council must explain its decision to the requesting party. Catholic and Jewish clergy may include time spent on missions abroad in calculations for social security. Protestant clergy are eligible to receive social security benefits, including health insurance and a government-provided retirement pension with a maximum credit of 15 years of service, but pension distributions for these clergy are more restrictive than for Catholic clergy, who are entitled to a government-provided pension that covers their entire career up to a maximum of 38.5 years of service. Muslim, Orthodox, and Jehovah's Witnesses clergy are also eligible for social security benefits under the terms of separate social security agreements each of these groups negotiated with the state.

Recognition policy: the government maintains a bilateral agreement with the Holy See, executed in part by the Episcopal Conference of Spain. The Episcopal Conference interacts with the government on behalf of the entire Catholic community. While other religious groups are required to register each place of worship, per an agreement with the Holy See, individual Catholic dioceses and parishes are not required to register with the government. The Catholic Church is the only religious entity to which persons may elect to allocate a percentage of their taxes. On March 29, the Council of Ministers approved an amendment to the government's bilateral agreement with the Holy See to exclude tax exemptions related to construction and installation projects and special contributions. The government also has cooperation agreements with CIE, FEREDE, and FCJE. These agreements with the country's four predominant religions – Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Judaism – are legally binding and provide the religious groups with certain tax exemptions and the ability to buy and sell property, open a house of worship, and conduct other legal business. The agreements also grant civil validity to weddings performed by clergy and permit the placement of teachers of religion in schools and chaplains in hospitals, the military, and prisons. Groups with cooperation agreements are also eligible for independently administered government grants. The agreements cover legal, educational, cultural, and economic affairs; religious observance by members of the armed forces; and the military service of clergy and members of religious orders. Registered groups that wish to sign cooperation agreements with the state must first acquire *notorio arraigo* ("deeply rooted" or permanent) status through the Ministry of the Presidency's Office of Religious Affairs. To achieve this status, groups must have an unspecified "relevant" number of followers, a presence in the country for at least 30 years, and a "level of diffusion" in the general population that the government considers demonstrates a "social presence," which is not further defined. Groups must also submit documentation demonstrating the group is religious in nature to the Office of Religious Affairs, which maintains the Register of Religious Entities. Jehovah's Witnesses, the Buddhist Union, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Episcopal Orthodox Assembly of Spain and Portugal, and, as of September, the Baha'i Community of Spain are registered religions with *notorio arraigo* status. The Pluralism and Coexistence Coalition (FPC) is a governmental entity attached to the Ministry of the Presidency that promotes religious freedom and diversity. It provides funding to non-Catholic religious denominations that have a cooperation agreement with the government in support of activities that promote cultural, educational, and social integration. It provides non-financial assistance to other religious groups registered with the government to increase public awareness. The foundation also promotes dialogue and rapprochement among religious groups and the integration of religion in society. It works closely with the Office of Religious Affairs. The government funds religious services within the prison system for Catholic and Muslim groups, including Sunday Catholic Mass, Catholic confessions, and Friday Islamic prayer. The cooperation agreements of FCJE and FEREDE with the government do not include provisions for publicly funded services. These groups provide religious services in prisons at their own expense. Other religious groups registered as religious entities with the Office of Religious Affairs may provide services at their own expense during visiting hours upon the request of prisoners. The government guarantees access to centers for asylum seekers and refugees for religious workers of groups with cooperation agreements with the state so that these groups may provide direct assistance, at their expense, to their followers in the centers. Religious workers from groups without a cooperation agreement with the government may enter internment centers upon request to the Ministry of the Presidency. The government recognizes marriages performed by all religious communities with *notorio arraigo* status. Members of religious groups without this status must marry in a civil ceremony for the marriage to be legally recognized. The regions of Madrid and Catalonia maintain agreements with several religious groups that have accords with the national government. These regional agreements permit activities such as providing religious assistance in hospitals and prisons under regional jurisdiction. The central government funds these services for the military, and the regional governments fund hospital and prison services. According to the central government, these subnational agreements may not contradict the principles of the federal agreements, which take precedence.

Key restriction tools imposed: bilateral cooperation agreements are dependent on authoritative decree from the president, excessive informational requirements, geographic quota, longevity quota, membership quota, onerous registration procedures, registration is a precondition for recognition (bilateral cooperation agreements), second procedure, vertical recognition system (verticalism). On December 1, FEREDE filed an appeal with the High Courts of Murcia against the City Council of Lorca, a municipality within the autonomous community of Murcia, for an amendment to its Urban Development Plan approved on January 3. The amendment required religious establishments to be in buildings exclusively for worship and meet certain accessibility requirements, including a certain number of toilets and parking facilities. FEDERE expressed concern that the new requirements hindered religious institutions from opening new places of worship. The appeal was pending at year's end. Non-Catholic religious groups continued to express concern about what they said was unequal legal treatment by the government. According to media outlets, one in three Spaniards chose to allocate some of their taxes to the Catholic Church during the year, yielding over €320 million (\$352.4 million), an 8.5 percent increase in donations compared with 2021. Other religious groups were not listed on the tax form as potential recipients of funds. Several religious groups, including Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists, and the Church of Jesus Christ, continued to express their desire to have their groups included on the tax form. They said they would prefer to receive voluntary contributions from taxpayers without preconditions rather than relying on funding from the FPC, which has specific conditions for use of its funds. CIE, FEREDE, and FCJE relied on government funds provided through the FPC to cover their administrative and infrastructure costs. The Ministry of the Presidency continued to allocate funding to different groups according to the number of their registered entities and the approximate number of adherents. In January, it provided FEREDE with €526,780 (\$580,000), CIE with €433,430 (\$477,000), and FCJE with €210,712 (\$222,000). In addition to infrastructure and administrative funding, foundation funds also covered small publicity and research projects. On April 25, the Ministry of the Presidency reached an agreement with Jehovah's Witnesses, the Buddhist Union, the Church of Jesus Christ, and the Episcopal Orthodox Assembly of Spain and Portugal on a proposal for the government to provide tax benefits similar to those received by FEREDE, CIE, and FCJE. The proposal was halted in parliament in July due to national elections and the ongoing Spanish government formation process. The Buddhist Union reported the initiative, if approved, would improve equal treatment between religious organizations with *notorio arraigo* status and those with agreements with the Spanish government (see section 2). The FPC continued outreach campaigns, including organizing an exhibition titled "Neither New nor Foreign: Religious Diversity in Spain," aimed at promoting a better understanding of the history of religious diversity in Spain and respect for religious freedom. The FPC continued working with religious groups on the opening and operation of places of worship, the impact of religious education, and the effects of discrimination and limits to religious freedom in the workplace. The Office of Religious Affairs maintained a variety of online resources, including a directory of all registered religious communities and places of worship and a dictionary with visual and auditory elements aimed at enriching the understanding of religious diversity. The Ministry of the Interior's Office on Hate Crimes continued to provide assistance to victims of religiously motivated hate crimes and training for law enforcement. Several regional and municipal government offices continued to conduct outreach with the stated goal of promoting religious diversity. In September, the Office of Religious Affairs of the Catalan regional government published the 2022 Map of Religions in Catalonia, identifying a total of 7,291 places of worship in the region comprising 14 religious groups. The Catalan Office of Religious Freedom awarded a total of one million euros (1.06 million dollars) in grants to 76 religious communities' refurbishment and improvement projects. The grants were aimed at improving the safety, hygiene, and accessibility of places of worship, as well as their compliance with regulations.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Make bilateral cooperation agreements available to all groups so that they may then comprise a positive and characteristically dynamic element of the Spanish system; revoke the imposition of geographic quota, longevity quota, excessive informational requirements, membership quota, and all the other restriction tools identified; to become Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that works to manage the recognition system in a way that is independent of government control.

Sri Lanka, Democratic Socialist Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



FoRB Claim: Partial claim is made that according to a 2017 Supreme Court ruling excludes the right to propagate one's religion.

Secularity: Buddhism is the state religion; according to a 2003 Supreme Court ruling, the state is constitutionally required to protect only Buddhism; the law also recognises but to a lesser degree Christianity, Hinduism and Islam; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2015.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2015.

Human rights instruments: Sri Lanka is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCR, and the UNDRIP; Sri Lanka did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Sri Lankan law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally in the country. There is no registration requirement for central religious bodies of groups affiliated with the four recognised religions Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity. New religious groups, including groups affiliated with the four recognised religions, must register with the government to obtain approval to construct new places of worship, sponsor religious worker (missionary) visas and immigration permits, operate schools, and apply for subsidies for religious education. Religious groups may also seek incorporation by an act of parliament, which requires a simple majority and affords religious groups state recognition. In 2022, the government issued a ministerial circular that superseded and expanded the scope of an 2008 circular and outlined new requirements for construction, maintenance, and registration of places of worship for all faiths. Like the previous circular, the 2022 ministerial circular requires all groups, regardless of their religion, to receive permission from the ministry to register and to construct new places of worship. Matters related to family law, including divorce, child custody, and property inheritance, are adjudicated either under customary law of the ethnic or religious group in question or under the country's civil law. According to the 1951 Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA), Islamic personal law governs marriages and divorces of Muslims, while civil law applies to most property rights. In the Northern Province, civil law governs marriages, while the Thesawalamai (Tamil customary law) often governs the division of property. For some Sinhalese, Kandyan personal law (based on the traditions of the Sinhalese Kandyan kingdom that preceded British colonial rule) governs civil matters, such as inheritance issues, and works within the caste system. Civil law governs most marriages of Sinhalese and Tamils of various religions, including marriages involving individuals of different faiths or those of individuals who state no religious affiliation. Religious community members report practices vary by region, and numerous exceptions exist.

Recognition policy: the Ministry of Buddhhasana, Religious, and Cultural Affairs, is the cabinet ministry responsible for oversight of Theravada Buddhism. Specific subcabinet departments under the ministry are responsible for addressing the concerns of each major religious community.

Key restriction tools imposed: limitations exist on proselytism, non-recognition of any religion other than Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam, successful registration is dependent upon parliamentary vote (parliamentarianism). Religious minority groups reported incidents of violence by members of local majority religious communities and said that state officials often supported those responsible. Analysts studying incidents of violence against Christians said that in some cases, state officials sided with those who demanded that Christians cease activities in "Buddhist villages" or obtain permission from the Ministry of Buddhhasana, Religious, and Cultural Affairs to conduct worship activities. The NCEASL agreed with the analysts' findings, reporting that evangelical Christian groups continued to report that police and local government officials were complicit in the harassment of religious minorities and their places of worship and often sided with the majority religious community in the area. On May 23, local media and civil society organizations reported police arrested nine supporters of the political party Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) for violating a court order as they protested what they said was illegal construction of a Buddhist temple on private land in Thaiyiddy, Jaffna District. Police forcibly removed TNPF Member of Parliament (MP) Selvarasa Kajendren from the site. On May 24, the Mallakam Magistrate Court released all nine on bail and issued an order allowing peaceful protests. According to civil society groups, local farmers owned 12 acres surrounding the temple, but the military had occupied the land since the civil war. Since early May, political groups called for removal of the temple, on which Chief of Defense Staff and former Army commander General Shavendra Silva initiated construction in 2021 for use by security forces. Media reported the temple was completed and opened on May 25. As of year's end, charges remained pending on the nine arrested, and local Tamils continued to call for the temple's removal. Some civil society critics and lawyers said the 2022 circular mandating registration for all places of worship and outlining requirements for construction and maintenance of religious places was not based on existing law and thus was unconstitutional. The NCEASL and other civil society representatives said the government used the regulation to unfairly target minority places of worship. Some Christian groups said that government officials deemed Christian places of worship unauthorized or illegal if they failed to produce proof of registration and threatened them with legal action if they did not register. If the groups tried to register, however, they said the registration process continued indefinitely without resolution. For example, one church reported it had been trying unsuccessfully to register for decades. Christian groups reported that they experienced difficulties in complying with registration requirements, in part because instructions were inconsistent and not transparent. Without the consent of the local community or the local Buddhist temple, local councils often did not approve the construction of new religious buildings. Church leaders said they repeatedly appealed to local government officials and the Ministry of Buddhhasana for assistance, with limited success. Instead, unregistered Christian groups stated they continued to incorporate as commercial trusts, legal societies, or NGOs but without formal government recognition as religious groups. Nondenominational churches said they faced restrictions on holding meetings or constructing new places of worship. According to a local NGO report, government officials, police, and intelligence services frequently requested Christian groups show proof of registration of their place of worship and provide information on the leadership of the organization, the composition of the congregation, and religious rituals. The NCEASL reported that on February 11 the pastor of the Thambalagamam Evangelical Church in Trincomalee District received a letter from the local authority stating that worship services should be discontinued as they were conducted without proper permission and registration. The letter further stated that the church should obtain the necessary approval from the Ministry of Buddhhasana, Religious, and Cultural Affairs. On August 6, a neighbor threw stones at the Foursquare Gospel Church in Gonawala in Gampaha District and told the pastor to discontinue prayer services in the village. On August 13, during the prayer services, the neighbor threw a brick at the church and attempted to assault a church worker recording the incident. When the pastor and the worker filed a complaint, Kelaniya police requested church documents. The pastor provided the act of parliament through which the church was incorporated. The police officer in charge (OIC) said regular worship services with a group was prohibited without approval from local authorities, that the church's incorporation was invalid, and the church was not registered locally. Subsequently, the church worker lodged a private complaint against the neighbor for attempted assault. When the church worker inquired about the complaint on August 19, a police officer told the church worker that he needed approval from the local authorities and that worship services could only be held with those on the household's official electoral list. The police said he had asked the neighbor to report if any outsiders visited the church premises. Following this, the church conducted prayer services exclusively with family members, while other congregants joined via Zoom. Jehovah's Witnesses reported that some religious groups present in the country for decades still found it difficult to register and be recognized as a Christian religion. Jehovah's Witnesses said they had been present and active in the country for more than a century and reported more than 7,000 members. Despite multiple meetings with the Ministry of Buddhhasana and the Department of Christian Affairs in 2020 and 2021, they said they did not receive clear guidelines regarding registration and, as an unregistered religious group, did not receive the same rights and privileges as registered religious groups. A 2023 report released by a religious group said the approval process for construction permits for places of worship lacked transparency and consistency resulting in abuse and discrimination against some religious groups, including minority religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses. The report said the 2022 circular had no provision for applicants to submit complaints or appeals. Buddhist nuns, or bhikkunis, reported that throughout the year the Ministry of Buddhhasana continued to refuse to issue them national identity cards due to opposition from senior Buddhist monks. Bhikkunis were only able to obtain registration as dasasilmatas – an alternative female Buddhist order with no ordination. The BBC reported that without national identity cards or other form of legal recognition, bhikkunis could not open bank accounts, obtain passports, or access some educational benefits, such as completing government examinations. Bhikkunis and some Buddhist monks said the problem was due to prejudice against nuns and highlighted a 2009 Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka statement that not registering bhikkunis and refusing to issue them identification cards was a violation of their human rights. According to members of Christian groups, local authorities sometimes demanded their groups stop worship activities or relocate their places of worship outside the local jurisdiction, ostensibly to maintain community peace. The NCEASL reported that on February 12, during a Sunday service at the Pentecostal Assembly of Sri Lanka in Dodangoda in Kalutara District, police informed the pastor that local monks complained church services were illegal and requested the church discontinue worship until an inquiry was completed. When the pastor went to the police station the following day for an inquiry, monks and villagers asked him to discontinue services as it was a "Buddhist village." At a later meeting, a monk said the pastor engaged in proselytism, which is illegal, by offering money and goods. The police OIC ordered the pastor not to meet with congregants outside his family and threatened to file a case against him for breach of peace. A group of monks and villagers threatened the pastor and his family. On February 19, police informed the pastor that no case would be filed but requested the church register through the local authority. On February 24, the pastor lodged a police complaint against the man who threatened him; during the inquiry the police OIC reprimanded the accused for threatening the pastor and said anyone in the country has a right to religious freedom. According to civil society groups, members of the CID, military intelligence, local police stations, the Terrorism Investigation Department, the army, and the navy surveilled minority religious groups. In many cases, officers were dressed in civilian clothing and did not provide identification. Muslim civil society representatives said that young persons involved in social work and the parents and relatives of those detained under the PTA were the main targets of state surveillance. Civil society representatives said that police and intelligence services used "national security," "disturbance of the peace," and "criminal trespass and intimidation" as pretexts to harass and intimidate members of minority religious groups. They said that in some cases, law enforcement officers acted in concert with local residents or members of the Buddhist clergy. In March, the chairman of the Parliament Sectoral Oversight Committee on National Security and ruling party Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna MP Sarath Weerasekera said that "even though terrorism has been curbed, there is still a risk of religious extremism operating in this country. Special attention should be paid to unregistered madrasa schools that only teach religion and language, and to people who come to Sri Lanka from abroad and give extremist views and lectures..." The government continued to require all imported Islamic religious books, including the Quran, to undergo review before being released as part of what the Ministry of Defense said was a counterterrorism measure to screen for extremist content. Some Muslim community members said the process discouraged the importation of Islamic religious books.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (not free; restricted); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; restricted); public expression and observance (not free; religious attire covering the face are banned); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish provisions for existential recognition that give equal opportunity for all belief systems to access this form of recognition; this equality may not be able to be achieved without Theravada's disestablishment as the state denomination; revoke involvement of the parliament or prime minister from the registration process in order to halt politicisation; to become Dynamic, establish a recognition agency to manage the recognition system independent of government influence or intervention.

Sudan, Republic of the

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Sudan is a secular state (Sunni Islam was disestablished in 2020); theism is affirmed in the oaths of the chairman and members of the Sovereignty Council and Cabinet and of the speaker and members of the Transitional Legislative Council.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2019.

Human rights instruments: Sudan is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Sudan did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional and malregistration.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – new Sudanese law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally in the country. To gain official recognition by the government, religious groups are required to register at the state level with the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA). The MRA and the state-level entities responsible for land grants and planning may authorize permits to build new houses of worship, taking into account zoning concerns. Allocation of land to religious entities is determined at the state level. The Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) oversees nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and nonprofit organizations. Religious groups that engage in humanitarian or development activities must register as nonprofit NGOs by filing a standard application required by the HAC. Only NGOs registered with the HAC are eligible to apply for other administrative benefits, including land ownership, tax exemptions, and work permits. The HAC works with the Ministry of Interior to facilitate the visa process for NGO representatives seeking to obtain visas. An interministerial committee, which includes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the General Intelligence Service, and, in some cases, the military intelligence service, must approve foreign clergy and other foreigners seeking a residency permit.

Malregistration – the ongoing civil war across Sudan undermines registration laws established to protect religious communities under the law.

Recognition policy: the MRA is responsible for regulating Islamic religious practice, supervising churches, and guaranteeing equal treatment for all religious groups. The MRA also provides recommendations to relevant ministries regarding religious issues that government ministries encounter. Under the law, the Minister of Justice may release any prisoner who memorizes the Quran during his or her prison term. The release requires a recommendation for parole from the prison's director general, a religious committee composed of the Sudan Scholars Organization, and members of the Fiqh Council, which consults with the MRA to ensure decisions comply with Islamic jurisprudence. The MRA has federal entities in each state that coordinate travel for the Hajj and Umrah. Government offices and businesses are closed on Friday for prayers and follow a Sunday to Thursday work week. A 2019 decree mandates that academic institutions shall not give examinations on Sunday and authorizes Christians to leave work at 10 a.m. on Sunday for religious activities. Individuals may also leave work to celebrate Orthodox Christmas, an official state holiday, along with several key Islamic holidays.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, secondary procedure specific to religious groups with humanitarian arms or affiliated organisations that conduct humanitarian or development activities, constructing places of worship is based on a system of land allocation performed at the state level which takes into consideration zoning concerns, some agreements made in support for religious freedom in 2020 have yet to be implemented (e.g. the creation of an independent commission on religious freedom issues). Leaders of religious institutions said they needed to formally request permission to import items such as vehicles into the country, but that these items continued to be tax exempt. While some church officials encountered obstacles requesting visas and resident permits for foreign Christian missionaries, the officials stated they did not face difficulties regarding tax-exempt status.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hieronymy** (not free; importation of non-Islamic religious materials and devotional items is restricted); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that can provide both existential recognition and legal registration for all belief systems and groups regardless of their affiliation; establish a recognition agency to manage the recognition system autonomously from state authorities.

Suriname, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Suriname is a secular state; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 1992.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “religious origin” was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 1992.

Human rights instruments: Suriname is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Suriname did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional**.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Surinamese law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally in the country. Religious groups need only register with the Ministry of Home Affairs if they seek financial support, including stipends for clergy, from the government. Registering with the ministry does not confer tax benefits. To register, religious groups must supply contact information, a history of their group, and addresses for houses of worship. Most religious groups are officially registered. Followers of some Indigenous religious practices, however, lack formal houses of worship and therefore are not able to register with the government.

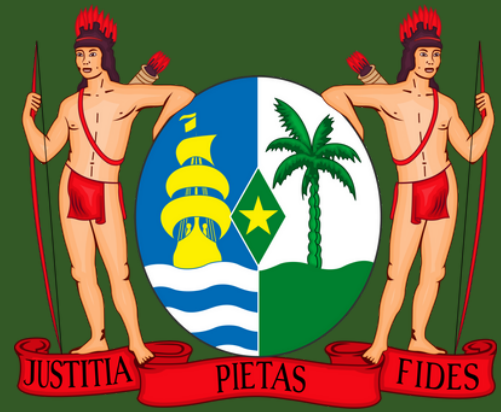
Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, as long as informational requirements are not misused against unfavoured group by the state they are permissible. According to the Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname and the Maroon organization Kampos, government policies concerning the granting of land titles in traditional Indigenous and Maroon territories infringed on the ability of these groups to fully experience their religious freedom because the worship of nature is a critical component of their religious beliefs. The armed forces continued to maintain a staff chaplaincy with Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic clergy available to military personnel. The Religious Affairs Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs continued to support different religious groups by providing stipends to all registered clergy, which number several hundred from across all religions.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a set of provisions for existential recognition, not just legal registration, and extend this to all belief systems; establish a recognition agency to manage the recognition system autonomously from state authorities.



Sweden, Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.



Secularity: Sweden is officially a secular state (the Church of Sweden, an Evangelical Lutheran denomination, was disestablished in 2000 but is still recognised as the national church); however, the Church of Sweden receives exclusive privileges; theism is affirmed in the Act of Succession.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “religious affiliation” was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2012.

Human rights instruments: Sweden is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Sweden voted in favour of the UDHR; Sweden is party to the ECHR.

Mandatory of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Swedish law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally in the country. There is no legal requirement for religious groups to register or otherwise seek recognition. Only those faith communities registered with the Agency for Support for Faith Communities (SST), however, are eligible to receive government funding and tax exemptions similar to those of nonprofit organizations. To register with the SST, a religious group must apply to the Ministry of Culture demonstrating the group fulfills certain requirements, including that it has operated in the country for at least five years, has a clear and stable structure, is able to function independently, serves at least 3,000 persons, and has several locations in the country. The government facilitates fundraising by religious groups by offering them the option of collecting contributions through the Tax Agency in exchange for a one-time fee of 75,000 Swedish kronor (\$7,500) and an annual fee of 21 kronor (\$2) per member per year. The Church of Sweden is exempted from the annual fee because it, unlike other religious groups participating in the program, does not receive financial support from the SST. Only religious groups registered with the SST may participate in the program. Religious groups choose what percentage of members’ annual taxable income to collect, with a median collection rate of 1 percent. The Tax Agency subtracts a percentage of the member’s gross income and distributes it to the religious organization. The member’s contribution is not deductible from income tax. The government provides grants to registered religious groups through the SST that are proportional to the size of a group’s membership. Registered religious groups may also apply for separate grants for specific purposes, such as security expenses. The military offers food options that are compliant with religious dietary restrictions. Each military district has a chaplain. According to the law, chaplains may be of any religious affiliation, but all current chaplains belong to the Church of Sweden. Regardless of religious denomination, chaplains are required to perform religious duties for members of other faiths or refer service members to spiritual leaders of other faiths if requested. The law specifically exempts members of Jehovah’s Witnesses from national military service. Other conscientious objectors may apply for unarmed military service but are in practice not inducted into the military. Armed forces guidelines allow religious headwear. Individuals serving in the military may observe their particular religious holidays in exchange for not taking equivalent leave on public holidays.

Key restriction tools imposed: ambiguous qualifications for registered status (e.g. “has a clear and stable structure”, “is able to function independently”), geographic quota (must have “several locations in the country”), longevity quota, membership quota (at least 3,000 people), non-recognition for any religion or denomination other than the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden. The government continued to review the former government’s proposed legislation that would require faith communities and civil society organizations to meet “democracy criteria” to be eligible for state grants. Minister for Social Affairs Jakob Forssmed stated that the government had considered input from civil society and religious leaders on similar legislation proposed by a previous government and would incorporate feedback from religious groups in the new proposal. Christian representatives and interfaith organizations stated that some regional and municipal levels had already initiated use of democracy criteria as a condition of granting funds. If adopted, the proposed “democracy criteria” legislation would permit the SST or other parts of the government to deny or withdraw funding if a faith community’s congregation members or representatives used violence, coercion, or threats against a person; violated children’s or a congregation member’s rights; discriminated against individuals or groups; otherwise violated the principle of the equal value of all human beings; or opposed the democratic system of government.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Revoke the geographic quota, longevity quota and membership quota as well as reverse the policy of non-recognition for all non-Lutheran denominations; to be classified Dynamic, establish a recognition agency to manage the recognition system autonomously from government interference.

Swiss Confederation

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Switzerland is officially a secular state at the federal level; however, the Swiss Reformed Church and the Roman Catholic Church receive exclusive privileges and preferential treatment in 22 out of the 26 cantons forming the confederation; the Christian Catholic Church of Switzerland and the Jewish community also receive financial support in some cantons; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2014.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2014.

Human rights instruments: Switzerland is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UDHR; Switzerland did not vote on the UDHR; Switzerland is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Swiss federal law does not formally mandate that religious or belief organisations must register with the government to operate legally in the country, any organisation that receives financial donations and maintains a connection to a religious community must register with the commercial registry which in effect makes registration mandatory. There is no law requiring religious groups to register in a cantonal commercial registry, although religious foundations, characterized as institutions with a religious purpose that receive financial donations and maintain connections to a religious community, must register in the commercial registry. To register, the foundation must submit an official letter of application to relevant authorities that includes the organization's name, purpose, board members, and head office location as well as a memorandum of association based on local law, a trademark certification, and a copy of the foundation's organizational documents. Tax-exempt status granted to religious groups varies from canton to canton. Most cantons automatically grant tax-exempt status to religious communities that receive cantonal financial support, while all other religious communities must generally establish that they are organized as nonprofit associations and submit an application for tax-exempt status to the cantonal government. The Roman Catholic Church, Christian Catholic Church, and Reformed Church, which are financially supported by some cantons, do not have the same obligation, and all donations to these groups are tax deductible. The law exempts clerics from mandatory military service, the law defines clerics as members of a religious order living in a communal congregation bound by a religious oath and official duties or officials of a formally organized religious community with more than 2,000 members, who are older than 25, and have at least three years of religious education. Religious groups of foreign origin are free to proselytize, but foreign missionaries from countries that are not members of the EU or the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) must obtain a religious-worker visa to work in the country. Visa requirements include proof a local citizen could not fill the position and the foreigner has completed formal theological training, speaks the local language, and will be financially supported by the host organization. Clergy of international churches catering to an English-speaking audience also must fulfill these requirements, while professionals in the private sector are not required to learn one of the local languages. Unrecognized religious groups must also demonstrate to cantonal governments that the number of their foreign religious workers is not out of proportion with the size of the community when compared with the relative number of religious workers of religious communities recognized by cantons. Immigrant clerics, like all immigrants, must also comply with four integration requirements: respect for public safety, security and order, respect for the values of the constitution, local language skills, and participation in economic life or efforts to acquire an education. Cantons may approve the residence permit of an applicant lacking these four criteria by devising an "integration agreement" that sets certain goals for the applicant to meet, such as attending language courses. The host organization must also "recognize the country's legal norms" and pledge it will not tolerate abuse of the law by its members. If an applicant does not meet these requirements, the government may deny, shorten, or revoke residency and work permits. The government may refuse residency and work permits if a background check reveals an individual has ties to religious groups deemed "radicalized" or that have engaged in "hate preaching," which is defined as publicly inciting hatred against a religious group, disseminating ideologies intended to defame members of a religious group, organizing defamatory propaganda campaigns, engaging in public discrimination, denying or trivializing genocide or other crimes against humanity, or refusing to provide service based on religion. The law authorizes immigration authorities to refuse residency permits to clerics the government considers "fundamentalists" if authorities deem internal security or public order is at risk.

Recognition policy: all cantons, with the exception of Geneva, Neuchatel, Ticino, and Vaud, financially support at least one of four religious communities – Roman Catholic Church, Christian Catholic Church, Reformed Church, or Jewish community – that the cantons have recognized as public religious entities. Such public support is provided with funds collected through a mandatory church tax on registered church members and, in 18 of 26 cantons, an additional tax on businesses. The church tax on businesses is collected regardless of the religious affiliation of their owners. The funds collected are distributed proportionally among the religious communities recognized by cantons. Only religious groups recognized as state churches or public entities are eligible to receive funds collected through the church tax, and no canton has recognized any religious groups other than these four. Payment of the church tax is voluntary in the cantons of Ticino, Neuchatel, and Geneva, while in all other cantons any individual who elects not to pay the church tax is required to formally leave the religious institution. Church tax is generally tax deductible from the personal income tax. The canton of Vaud is the only canton that does not collect a church tax, but the Reformed Church and Roman Catholic Church are still subsidized directly through the canton's budget. In the cantons of Bern and Vaud, the government pays the salaries of priests and clergy of the Roman Catholic, Christian Catholic, and Reformed Churches. All other religious communities fund themselves solely through donations from their members or from abroad, which in most cases are only partially or not at all tax deductible. The Canton of Valais collects a tax regardless of religious affiliation from individuals and companies, which goes directly to the Reformed Church and the Catholic Church.

Key restriction tools imposed: provincialisation of both recognition and registration procedures, subjecting recognition to democratic vote (against RoRB standards), vertical recognition system in effect (verticalism). A 2009 constitutional amendment approved through a referendum prohibits the construction of minarets. The prohibition does not apply to the four existing mosques with minarets established before 2009. The law allows the construction of new mosques without minarets. During the year, the Free Churches Association highlighted the continuing financial disparity in government support and reported evidence of increased limits on Christians to freely exercise their faith in public. The association also reported that tax-exempt status was increasingly restrictively granted, and only for activities that were strictly nonreligious. In the canton of Bern, free church leaders reported that donations for social activities, such as visiting homes for the elderly, were no longer tax deductible, a policy pending judicial appeal by the free churches at the end of the year. Citing the separation of church and state, the cantonal government of Geneva continued to prohibit public baptisms in Lake Geneva by the two free churches. The government based its decision on a 2020 law allowing only the three officially recognized religious institutions – the Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Christian Catholic Church – to conduct religious activities in public spaces. A 2022 administrative appeal by the two groups directly affected by the policy remained pending at year's end. The government continued to grant visas primarily to religious workers who would replace individuals serving in similar functions in the same religious community. The government required Turkish nationals applying for short- and long-term religious worker visas to document their association with the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs. The government did not issue visas to missionaries or religious teachers coming from countries outside the EU and EFTA without a theological degree. This primarily affected the Church of Jesus Christ, most of whose missionaries do not typically hold theological degrees. The Church's missionaries from EU and EFTA countries, however, continued to enter legally and work without a religious visa. The government funded six Muslim counselors to visit centers for asylum seekers to mediate conflicts and to offer pastoral care. Imams also received funds to provide counseling for Muslim inmates in prison. The army continued to utilize military chaplains representing the free churches, based on a partnership agreement. The army required candidates to complete both an assessment and an army chaplaincy course. Chaplains were not allowed to proselytize members of the military. Jewish and Muslim chaplains continued offering services. The army also continued training of additional or new chaplains from three traditional denominations, the Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Christian Catholic Church. In several cantons, among them Bern and Zurich, some parliamentarians supported efforts to abolish the mandatory church tax for companies, or at least give them the choice of which organizations to support. In Bern, one proposed popular initiative suggested that persons be given the choice to contribute their share of the mandatory church tax to religious organizations or nonreligious NGOs. According to Free Churches Association representatives, none of these initiatives were successful to date.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (not free; religious attire covering the face is illegal in two cantons); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (not free; restricted); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Remove all forms of segmentation in the system; this should in turn resolve inconsistencies in the legislation and laws regarding recognition and registration should in turn become national rather than cantonal; revoke identified restriction tools and all part-mandatory registration procedures; to become Receptive, establish a recognition system to bestow both existential recognition and legal registration across all belief systems and their derivatives and across multiple levels of activity and operation.



Syrian Arab Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Syria is officially a secular state; however, preferential treatment is directed towards Islam; theism is affirmed in the constitutional and presidential oaths.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “religion or creed” was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2012.

Human rights instruments: Syria is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Syria voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory and malregistration.



Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – by law, all religious groups must register with the regime to operate legally in Syria. Registered religious groups and clergy – including all government-recognized Muslim, Jewish, and Christian groups – receive free utilities and are exempt from real estate taxes on religious buildings and personal property taxes on their official vehicles. All meetings of religious groups, except for regularly scheduled worship, require permits from the government.

Malregistration – the ongoing Syrian Civil War drastically undermines the ability for the central government in Damascus to uphold registration law and protections for religious communities in all of the territory the government claims.

Recognition policy: the law regulates the structure and functions of the Awqaf. The law provides for a Council of Islamic Jurisprudence with the authority to define what religious discourse is appropriate and the authority to fine or penalize individuals who propagate “extremist” thought or deviate from approved discourse. The Minister of Religious Endowments chairs the council, which consists of 40 scholars whose tasks include setting the start and end dates of the month of Ramadan and issuing fatwas. The law also charges the council with monitoring all fatwas issued in the country and with preventing the spread of views associated with the Muslim Brotherhood or “Salafist” activity, including “Wahhabism.” The law concentrates a range of offices and institutions within the ministry, centralizing the regime’s role in and oversight of the country’s religious affairs. For the resolution of issues of personal status, the regime requires citizens to list their religious affiliation. Individuals are subject to their respective religious group’s laws concerning marriage and divorce. Per the personal status code, a Muslim man may legally marry a non-Muslim woman, but a Muslim woman may not legally marry a non-Muslim man. If a Christian woman marries a Muslim man, she is not allowed burial in an Islamic cemetery or inheritance of property or wealth from her husband unless she converts to Islam. The law states that if a Christian wishes to convert to Islam, the presiding Muslim cleric must inform the prospective convert’s diocese. The law prohibits adoption based on the provisions of Islamic sharia, with the exception of Catholic and Syriac Orthodox adoptions that follow a specific set of conditions. The personal status law on divorce for Muslims is based on an interpretation of sharia implemented by government-appointed religious judges. In interreligious personal status cases, sharia takes precedence. A divorced woman is not entitled to alimony in some cases; a woman may also forego her right to alimony to persuade her husband to agree to the divorce. In addition, under the law, a divorced mother loses the right to guardianship and physical custody of her sons when they reach the age of 13 and of her daughters at age 15, when guardianship transfers to the paternal side of the family. Church law governs personal status questions for Christians, in some cases barring divorce. Some personal status laws mirror sharia regardless of the religion of those involved in the case. The government’s interpretation of sharia is the basis of inheritance laws for all citizens except Christians. According to the law, courts may grant Muslim women up to half of the inheritance share of male heirs. In all communities, male heirs must provide financial support to female relatives who inherit less. An individual’s birth certificate records his or her religious affiliation. Documents presented when marrying or traveling for a religious pilgrimage also list the religious affiliation of the applicant. Jews are the only religious group whose passports and identity cards note their religion.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, ambiguous and inconsistent information over registration procedures, unapproved Islamic and all non-Islamic proselytism is illegal, preapproval of religious activities by the government (including all gatherings for religious purposes), presidential religion (resident of Syria must be a Muslim), prohibition of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, restrictions on the publication of religious materials, state definition of religion. By law, membership in certain types of religiously oriented organizations is illegal and punishable to different degrees. This prohibition includes membership in an organization that the government considers “Salafist,” a designation the government loosely associates with Sunni violent extremism. Neither the government broadly nor the state security court specifically has defined the parameters of what constitutes “Salafist” activity. The law prohibits political parties based on religion, tribal affiliation, or regional interests. Affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood is punishable by death or imprisonment. The government bans Jehovah’s Witnesses as a “politically motivated Zionist organization.” The law restricts proselytizing and conversion. It prohibits Muslims from converting to other religions as contrary to sharia. The law recognizes conversion to Islam. The penal code prohibits causing tension between religious communities. The law bars publication of content that affects “national unity and national security,” harms state symbols, defames religions, or incites sectarian strife or “hate crimes.” The law extends penalties from one month to 15 years’ imprisonment and increased fines from 200,000 Syrian pounds (\$23) to 15 million pounds (\$1,700). The Ministry of Religious Endowments (Awqaf) must approve books imported from abroad. Television shows require the approval of religious authorities. The penal code provides for penalties, to include detention, for the crimes of “compromising national identity,” “undermining the prestige of the state,” or “arousing racial or sectarian strife.” Some opposition groups identified themselves explicitly as Sunni Arab or Sunni Muslim in statements and publications. According to the NGO Freedom House, “While the largely Alawite-led regime presents itself as a protector of that and other religious minorities, Alawites, Christians, Druze, and members of other smaller sects who are outside Assad’s inner circle are politically disenfranchised.” Freedom House stated although the political elite included Sunnis, the Sunni majority, which comprised the bulk of the opposition, bore “the brunt of state repression as a result” of this broader disenfranchisement. The regime continued to target those within the country who criticized or opposed it, the majority of whom were Sunni and whom the regime described as violent extremists. However, according to major news outlets, in August the Assad regime began to encourage other denominations, particularly Jews and Christians, to practice their respective religions. According to a July report in the Economist, “the Assad dynasty has allied its own Alawite sect ... with Syria’s myriad religious minorities in order to bolster the regime’s dominance over the country’s Sunni Muslim majority.” The report stated this is an effort to increase the regime’s minority base and improve its international standing. Before the civil war, the regime previously allowed evangelical Christians to open churches in houses where Muslim converts to Christianity could worship, permitted the opening of yoga studios, and encouraged Jews of Syrian origin to visit Damascus. Analysts reported the regime continued to use the law allowing it to create redevelopment zones as well as confiscate property to reward those loyal to the regime, create obstacles for refugees and IDPs to reclaim their property and return to their homes, and engineer demographic changes. NGOs reported investigations continued into the usurpation of land and property rights of displaced owners, including through public auctions in areas retaken by regime forces. According to NGO reports, since the enactment of the redevelopment zone law in 2018, the regime replaced residents in former opposition-held areas with more loyal constituencies. These regime policies disproportionately affected Sunni populations, which made up the majority of the population. The regime continued to allow foreign Christian NGOs to operate under the auspices of one of the “historically established churches” (a designation made by the government) without officially registering. It continued to require foreign Islamic NGOs to register and receive Awqaf approval to operate. Security forces continued to question these Islamic organizations on their sources of income and to monitor their expenditures. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor continued to prohibit religious leaders from serving as directors on the boards of Islamic charities. The regime continued to exempt Christian and Muslim religious leaders from military service based on conscientious objection, although it continued to require Muslim religious leaders to pay a levy for exemption. According to experts, religion remained a factor in determining career advancement in the government. The Alawite minority continued to hold an elevated political status disproportionate to its numbers, particularly in leadership positions in the military, security, and intelligence services, although the senior officer corps of the military continued to accept individuals from other religious minority groups into its ranks. According to a 2020 report by the EU Agency for Asylum, Alawites “hold key regime positions, dominate the police and the army and have high-ranking positions in elite military and militia units.” The report also noted Alawites have higher chances of obtaining employment in the public sector compared to other groups such as Christians, Sunni Arabs, or Kurds. In January, the government issued Legislative Decree No. 2 to regulate the affairs and welfare of children of unknown parentage. According to the website of the Arabic news channel al-Arabiya, there are 1.2 million orphans in the country. According to STJ, the decree stated that a child of unknown parentage is a “Muslim unless proven otherwise” and that a foster family can apply to foster a child only “if the couple and the child share the same religion.” The NGO report stated the new provisions are unfair to non-Muslims, and neglected to specify factors that would allow a change in the child’s religion from Islam to another later in life.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarcy** (not free; non-Islamic literature requires government approval); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; illegal to proselytise Muslims); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the apparatus of laws the government has set in place to restrict religious activity outside what the government deems as appropriate; repeal all laws that impose nationwide bans on reasonable, non-violent groups whose activities do not contravene the basic tenets of religious freedom; repeal laws restricting both conversion from Islam and proselytism to Muslims; revoke the rule of mandatory registration and removal from the registration of all state definitions and interpretations of religion used for the imposition of restrictions and the removal of subjective language in the legislation which is again broadly misused to restrict rather than protect religious freedoms.

Taiwan (Republic of China)



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Partial claim was made in the latest revised constitution from 2005 that refers only to “freedom of religious belief”.

Secularity: Taiwan is a secular state.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2005.

Human rights instruments: Taiwan is party to the UNCRC; Taiwan is neither party to the ICCPR (however, the ICCPR has been incorporated into Taiwanese domestic law) nor the ICESCR; Taiwan did not vote on either the UDHR or the UNDRIP.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Religious groups may operate without registering. Taiwan categorizes registered religious groups as foundations, temples, or “social groups.” Most churches are registered as religious foundations. A religious group may voluntarily establish a religious foundation by registering with the courts once it obtains a permit from central or local authorities. The group must provide an organizational charter, a list of assets, and other administrative documents to register as a foundation. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) requires that groups seeking to establish a Taiwan-wide religious foundation have real estate in at least seven administrative regions valued at 25 million New Taiwan dollars (\$816,000) or more and possess at least five million New Taiwan dollars (\$163,000) in cash. Alternatively, the group may receive a permit if it possesses cash in excess of 30 million New Taiwan dollars (\$979,000). A group may apply instead for a permit to establish a local religious foundation from local authorities, who have lower threshold requirements than central authorities. Temples may directly register with local authorities without needing permission from the MOI. Taiwan-wide religious social groups and local religious social groups may register with the MOI and local authorities, respectively. There are no minimum financial requirements for registration of temples or religious social groups. Registered religious groups operate on an income-tax-free basis. Registered religious foundations and temples are also exempt from building and property taxes. Non-registered groups are not eligible for the tax advantages available to registered religious groups. As of 2022, there were approximately 17,800 registered religious groups, including 1,700 religious foundations, 11,800 temples, and 4,300 religious social groups, representing more than 22 religions. Many groups choose not to register individual places of worship and instead operate them as the personal property of the group’s leaders; such property is subject to taxes. The Falun Gong Society is registered as a sports organization and not as a religious group. The law provides that temples are under the management of a trustee monk or nun. It states, however, “They cannot take charge as trustee monk/nun if they are not citizens of the Republic of China [Taiwan].” The law does not apply to temples that are administered by Taiwan authorities (i.e., authorities own the land and buildings), local public organizations, or private persons. In 2004, the Council of Grand Justices declared several articles of the act unconstitutional, since it imposed undue restrictions on how religious groups transfer their assets. A 2022 law allows qualified religious groups to change the registration of real estate assets formerly held in the name of individual members to instead be held under the name of the associated religious foundation, religious corporation, or temple. The MOI separates religious and charitable groups based on a group’s articles of association. There is no law or policy that oversees a religious group’s use of donations made to that group, whether for religious or charitable activities, or that requires a religious group to establish a separate charitable entity to conduct charitable activities. The law, however, prohibits charitable foundations from using donations for noncharitable purposes. Some religious groups establish separate charitable foundations to promote their charitable activities. An organization whose primary objective is philanthropy is not eligible to register as a religious group.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, financial quota (have real estate valued in total at over \$902,000; and, possess at least \$180,000 in cash), geographic quota (have “real estate in at least 7 administrative regions), localisation of procedures offer an alternative procedure with lower requirements, secondary procedure for nationwide registration procedures. In September, the MOI elevated its section overseeing religious affairs to the departmental level to have broader jurisdiction over religious policy, religious foundation and ancestor worship guild affairs, funeral management, and ceremonial administrative work. Minister of Interior Lin said the organizational reform showcased Taiwan’s attention to religion, contributed to improvements in interagency communication, and would offer more assistance to religious groups. Lin added that the ministry would look to continue cooperation between Taiwan’s authorities and religious groups to build a more positive environment for religious development. The MOI continued efforts to prevent individuals from misappropriating property held by religious organizations; it worked with local governments to advise religious groups to change their property registration to the group, rather than a single individual. As of October, nearly 400 religious groups had applied to change the registration of real estate assets formerly held in the name of individual members to instead be held under the name of the associated religious foundation, corporation, or temple. The Tibet Religious Foundation stated that Tibetan Buddhist monks continued to be unable to obtain resident visas for religious work, which it said authorities typically granted to other religious practitioners. The foundation said the denials contravened Taiwan’s visa regulations. As a result, the monks had to fly to Thailand every two months to renew their visas. The monks did not have passports and instead traveled using Indian Identity Certificates (ICs); these certificates, issued to Tibetans who reside in India but do not have Indian citizenship, were reportedly valid for travel to all countries. Taiwan authorities said they issued temporary religious visas to IC holders based on general rules governing foreigners who use travel permits, and that denying the monks resident visas was not due to religious reasons.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the present segmented structure of the registration; revoke laws surrounding the establishment permit in preregistration including the dissolution of financial quotas; establish a revitalised recognition system that can provide both existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and at multiple levels of activity without creating a situation of vertical recognition; to classified Dynamic, set up an independent recognition agency to manage the system.

Tanzania, United Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Tanzania is officially a secular state; however, preferential treatment is granted to Christianity and Islam.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2005.

Human rights instruments: Tanzania is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Tanzania did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.



Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – religious groups must register with the Registrar of Societies at the Ministry of Home Affairs on the mainland and with the Office of the Registrar General on Zanzibar. Registration is required by law on both the mainland and in Zanzibar. The fines for offenses under the Societies Act, including operating without registration, range from one million to 10 million shillings (\$400 to \$4,000). To register, a religious group must provide the names of at least 10 members, a written constitution, resumes of its leaders, and a letter of recommendation from the district commissioner. Such groups may then list individual congregations, which do not need separate registration. Muslim groups registering on the mainland must provide a letter of approval from the National Muslim Council of Tanzania (BAKWATA). Muslim groups registering in Zanzibar must provide a letter of approval from the Mufti, the government's official liaison to the Muslim community. Christian groups in Zanzibar may register directly with the registrar general. The government does not designate religious affiliation on passports or records of vital statistics. Police reports must state religious affiliation if an individual will be required to provide sworn testimony. Applications for medical care must specify religious affiliation so that any specific religious customs may be observed. The law requires the government to record the religious affiliation of every prisoner and to provide facilities for worship for prisoners.

Recognition policy: since independence and by tradition, the country has been governed by alternating Christian and Muslim presidents who have, by tradition, appointed a prime minister from the other religious group with the endorsement of parliament. On the mainland, secular laws govern Christians and Muslims in both criminal and civil cases. In family-related cases involving inheritance, marriage, divorce, and the adoption of minors, the law also recognizes customary practices, which could include religious practices. In such cases, some Muslims choose to consult religious leaders in lieu of bringing a court case. Zanzibar, while also subject to the union constitution, is a semiautonomous region with its own President, court system, and legislature. Muslims in Zanzibar have the option of bringing cases to a civil or qadi (Islamic court or judge) court for matters of divorce, child custody, inheritance, and other issues covered by Islamic law. All cases tried in Zanzibar courts, except those involving Zanzibari constitutional matters and sharia, may be appealed to the Union Court of Appeals on the mainland. Decisions of Zanzibar's qadi courts may be appealed to a special court consisting of the Zanzibar chief justice and five other sheikhs. The President of Zanzibar appoints the chief qadi, who oversees the qadi courts and is recognized as the senior Islamic scholar responsible for interpreting the Quran. There are no qadi courts on the mainland. On the mainland, BAKWATA elects the Mufti. On Zanzibar, the president of Zanzibar appoints the Mufti, who serves as a leader of the Muslim community and as a public servant assisting with local governmental affairs. The Mufti of Zanzibar nominally approves all Islamic activities and supervises all mosques. The Mufti also approves religious lectures by visiting Islamic clergy and supervises the importation of Islamic literature from outside Zanzibar.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, excessive informational requirements (biographical information on group members and leaders as well as a letter of recommendation from the district commissioner), Islamic groups are offered different procedures and have the additional requirement of retrieving a "letter of approval" from the mufti, membership quota (at least 10 members), reregistration every five years (failure to reregister will result in deregistration and the subsequent inability to operate legally in the country due to the mandatoriness of registration). According to the Ministry of Home Affairs budget speech, 17 religious communities in the Mtwara and Lindi Regions were working with security and safety agencies to comply with a 2022 directive requiring all faith-based organizations, such as church-affiliated groups, to reregister for a five-year registration validity instead of the permanent validity that was previously in force. There were no reports of religious associations or faith-based organizations being deregistered under this directive during the year. According to human rights organizations, the government forcibly evicted Maasai communities from their ancestral land in the north of the country, which sources stated was a spiritual and cultural site for the Maasai. Maasai representatives reported that ongoing government-led forced evictions of Maasai pastoralists from their ancestral land in Loliondo and Ngorongoro continued to interfere with the Maasai's ability to practice their religion, which is intrinsically connected to this land. They also reported continued loss of access to significant sites of worship, including sacred trees, craters, hills, and other sites that the Maasai use for ceremonies and prayer. This includes loss of access to Ol Doinyo Lengai, or "Mountain of God," an active volcano which Maasai sources stated was where the Maasai believe their god lives, and where they conduct sacrifices during times of scarcity. According to the Maasai representatives, the government also continued to seize Maasai cattle, which they stated were spiritually significant and used in important religious traditions and ceremonies. The Maasai representatives also reported that several sacred objects were missing. On 7 June 2023, police in Mwanza Region arrested Pastor Herman Magigita, leader of the Neno church (Word church), on charges of operating without legal registration and preaching false doctrine to his church members. Magigita reportedly advocated faith healing through attendance at church prayers instead of going to the hospital. Community members from Chema village reported the pastor to police. The church was closed as of June 9 and remained closed at year's end, and an investigation was proceeding. According to some religious leaders, the government penalized prominent religious leaders for expressing views it deemed political and inflammatory. In March, the Registrar of Societies under the Ministry of Home Affairs suspended the operation of Dar es Salaam-based Spirit World Ministry Church led by Bishop Ceasar Masisi after a video clip of the bishop affirming the right to engage in same-sex relationships went viral on social media. On March 9, Masisi received an official suspension letter issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs. He was subsequently arrested, questioned, and later released on bail. On March 12, Masisi held a press conference and denied the charges, stating that unknown persons took video clips of his preaching out of context and posted them online. He requested that responsible authorities, including the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority, take legal action against all those who shared the video clips on social media. On 5th July 2023, Minister of Home Affairs Hamad Masauni gave a statement in Dodoma during an official meeting with the leaders of religious associations and councils, saying that some operated illegally and were not registered. He said that the government would act against all religious institutions that failed to comply with the law, including "the institution operated by Diana Bundala the self-proclaimed king," referring to the Mfalme Zumaridi Church led by Bundala, which remained unregistered despite having more than 500 members, as well as other emerging churches. In January, Bundala was sentenced to one year in prison on charges related to human trafficking. On September 29, local media reported that Pastor Mbarikiwa Mwakipesile was sentenced to three years and 14 days in prison after being found guilty by the Mbeya magistrate court of operating a church without registration. Public comments on social media alleged that he was imprisoned for his critical statements regarding an intergovernmental agreement with Dubai for Dubai Ports World (DP World) to manage port development projects in Dar es Salaam and elsewhere in the country rather than for the operation of his church.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieronymy (not free; subject to registration for propagational use); monasticism (not free; subject to registration); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; subject to registration); public expression and observance (not free; restricted); receiving donations (not free; subject to registration); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (not free; subject to registration); religious literature (not free; subject to registration); religious and worship services (not free; subject to registration); religious trade (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Repeal laws demanding mandatory registration and revoke policies allowing the government to intervene in the internal affairs of religious organisations; revoke membership quotas and retributions for unregistration; establish a revitalised recognition that can provide both existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems equally.

Thailand, Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForB Claim: Partial claim is made.

Secularity: Thailand is officially a secular state; however, the latest constitution from 2017 empowers the state to patronise and protect Buddhism, in particular the special promotion of Theravada Buddhism through education, the propagation of its principles, and the establishment of measures and mechanisms “to prevent the desecration of Buddhism in any form”; the law recognises Brahmin-Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and Sikhs.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “religious belief” was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2017.

Human rights instruments: Thailand is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Thailand voted in favour of the UDHR as Siam.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – groups associated with one of the five officially recognized religious groups may register to receive state benefits that include access to state subsidies, exemption from property and income taxes, and preferential allocation of resident visas for the registered organization’s foreign officials. These benefits are subsidized under various laws and regulations across multiple agencies. Registration as a religious group is not mandatory, and religious groups may operate without government interference, whether they are officially registered or recognized or not. The Religious Affairs Department (RAD) within the Ministry of Culture is responsible for registering new religious groups, except for Buddhist groups, which are overseen by the National Office of Buddhism (NOB), an independent state agency under direct supervision of the Prime Minister. Buddhist religious clerics who hold administrative and senior ecclesiastical posts are compensated by the NOB, while similar support for Islamic religious leaders is supplied by the Sub-Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of the Interior. The RAD may register a new religious group outside one of the five recognized religious groups when it meets the following qualifications: the national census indicates the group has at least 5,000 adherents, possesses a uniquely recognizable theology, is not politically active, and obtains formal approval in a RAD-organized meeting of representatives from the concerned ministries and the five recognized umbrella religious groups. To register with the RAD, a religious group’s leader also must submit documentation on the group’s objectives and procedures, any relationship to a foreign country, a list of executive members and senior officials, and locations of administrative, religious, and teaching sites. The government has not recognized any new religious groups outside the five umbrella groups, and the RAD reports that no applications were received during the year. Despite the lack of formal legal recognition or registration, civil society organizations report that unregistered religious groups operate freely and that the government’s practice of not recognizing or registering new religious groups does not restrict their activities. The RAD sets a quota for the number of foreign missionaries permitted to register and operate in the country: 1,357 Christian, six Muslim, 20 Hindu, and 41 Sikh. Registration confers some benefits, such as longer visa validity. Representatives of the five officially recognized religious groups may apply for one-year missionary visas that are renewable. Foreign missionaries from other religious groups are not eligible for missionary visas and must obtain tourist visas, which have a 90-day validity. Religious groups reported that being unregistered was not a significant barrier to foreign missionary activity, and many missionaries from unregistered groups worked in the country without government interference. According to government statistics from 2022, there were 11 registered foreign missionary groups with visas that operated in the country: six Christian, one Muslim, two Hindu, and two Sikh groups. In 2023 the government reported there were 1,004 foreign missionaries: 949 Christian, 3 Muslim, 20 Hindu, and 32 Sikh. Some foreigners entered the country on tourist visas to conduct missionary work or activities in support of missionaries and were required to depart after 90 days.

Recognition policy: a special order issued by the former military government in 2016 and still in effect provides for the state’s promotion and protection of “all recognized religions” in the country, but it mandates that all state agencies monitor the “right teaching” of all religions to ensure they are not “distorted to upset social harmony.” Defaming or insulting Buddhism and Buddhist clergy is specifically prohibited by law. Violators may face up to one year’s imprisonment, fines of up to 20,000 baht (\$580), or both. The penal code prohibits the insult or disturbance of religious places or services of all officially recognized religious groups. Penalties range from imprisonment for one to seven years, a fine of 20,000 to 140,000 baht (\$580 to \$4,100), or both. The law officially recognizes five religious groups: Buddhists, Muslims, Brahmin-Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians. While there is no official state religion, the constitution requires the King to be Buddhist and declares that he is the “upholder of religions.” The constitution prohibits Buddhist priests, novices, monks, and other clergy from voting in elections, serving in the House of Representatives or Senate, or taking public positions on political matters. Christian clergy may vote in elections as long as they are not wearing formal religious attire. Except for the Chularatchamontri (Grand Muefti), imams are not regarded as priests or clergy and thus may vote in elections and assume political positions. The Sangha Supreme Council serves as Thai Buddhism’s governing clerical body. The King has unilateral authority to appoint or remove members from the Sangha Supreme Council irrespective of the monk’s rank and without consent or consultation with the Supreme Patriarch, whom the King also has legal authority to appoint. Authorities continued to recognize elected provincial Islamic committees. Their responsibilities included providing advice to provincial governors on Islamic issues; deciding on the establishment, relocation, merger, and dissolution of mosques; appointing imams; and issuing announcements and approvals of Islamic religious activities. Committee members in the Deep South continued to report that some acted as advisers to government officials in dealing with the area’s ethnonationalist and religious tensions.

Key restriction tools imposed: criticism of Buddhism may lead to fines or imprisonment, membership quota (in the form of a census quota), registered status will not be bestowed to any groups that belongs to a religion beyond the five already recognised by the government, registration procedures are split between Buddhist and non-Buddhist groups and organisations, state definition of religion, the government does not recognise religions or religious communities beyond the five already recognised, the prime minister directly supervises the registration of Buddhist groups. On 10th May 2023, a statement released by the Falun Dafa Information Center reported multiple Falun Gong practitioners in Thailand from China had been held in IDCs since 2014. The practitioners were held for immigration violations, not due to their religious identity. They reportedly requested UNHCR asylum status, which the country, however, does not recognize as a basis for legal immigration. Media outlets and NGOs reported in March that immigration authorities in Pattaya arrested 63 Chinese Christian members of the Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church, including dozens of children, for overstaying their visas and placed them in immigration detention. There were no reports that their religious beliefs played a role in the arrests and detentions. The group had applied with UNHCR for refugee status, and in April, immigration officials facilitated their departure for a third country. Buddhist monks and temple authorities continued to comply with a 2018 Sangha Supreme Council order prohibiting the use of temple land for political activities or rallies, meetings, or seminars for purposes that violated the law or affected national security, social order, or public morals. The law denying legal recognition to women monks (bhikkhunis) remained in effect despite the National Human Rights Commission’s 2015 recommendation that the government amend it. The Sangha Supreme Council continued to prohibit women from becoming monks, and women wishing to join the monkhood usually travelled to India or Sri Lanka to be ordained. Of the 239,023 Buddhist clergy in the country, between 250 and 300 were women. Since a gender equality law exempts cases involving “compliance with religious principles,” the government excluded bhikkhunis from gender equality protection. Government officials continued to neither oppose nor support ordination of women, although they allowed bhikkhunis to practice and establish monasteries and temples. Without official recognition, however, monasteries led by women continued to be ineligible for any of the government benefits received by sanctioned Buddhist temples – primarily tax exemptions, free medical care, and subsidies for building construction and running social welfare programs. While male monks in the Deep South received government protection from verbal threats or physical attacks, bhikkhunis did not. Buddhist monks continued to work as missionaries, particularly in border areas among the country’s tribal populations, and received some public funding. Buddhist missionaries worked in 279 communities and hill tribe regions in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Tak, and Petchaboon Provinces. Their focus was teaching Buddhism and community development. The Sangha Supreme Council required Buddhist missionaries to pass training and educational programs at Maha Makut Buddhist University or Maha Gulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University before being appointed as missionaries. The government, per regulation, did not permit foreign monks to serve as Buddhist missionaries. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continued to fill its special quota of 200 foreign missionaries, granted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and National Security Council. On October 22, the group dedicated a new temple in Bangkok, its first in the country. According to members of some indigenous communities, the government encouraged preservation of their cultural and religious heritage and supported economic opportunities for Indigenous communities in showcasing their handicrafts, cultures, and traditions. Community members also stated authorities sometimes intervened to dictate which crafts to produce or required Indigenous cultural rituals or religious ceremonies be conducted on certain days of the week to maximize the size of the audience of tourists. Members of Indigenous communities reported being fairly compensated for land when asked to relocate due to development, but also said communities consequently no longer had access to the affected ancestral lands and therefore were unable to fully conduct ancestral religious rites and worship in those locations according to their traditions.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the apparatus of laws and restrictive policies that have been put in place to restrict religious activity; establish a revitalised recognition system that crucially provides existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives without discrimination; remove all forms of undue involvement of the government in the internal affairs of religious organisations.

Timor-Leste, Democratic Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Timor-Leste is officially a secular state; however, preferential treatment and exclusive privileges are granted to the Roman Catholic Church and the Church was commended in the latest constitution from 2002 for its role in the country's liberation efforts; theism was affirmed in the same constitution from 2002.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2002.

Human rights instruments: Timor-Leste is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Timor-Leste did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – religious organizations that conduct religious services but do not engage in other activities do not need to register with the government and may obtain tax-exempt status from the Ministry of Finance. Religious organizations seeking to open private schools or provide other community services must submit articles of association and other relevant documentation to register as nonprofit corporate bodies through the Ministry of Justice's National Directorate for Registry and Notary Services (DNRN). The law requires a separate registration with the Ministry of Interior for associations with primarily foreign members, including religious organizations, which must submit their articles of incorporation, proof they have the means to carry out their activities, and the name of a designated representative. To receive a tax identification number, organizations must register first with the Ministry of Justice and then bring that registration to the Service for Registration and Verification of Businesses, the business registration agency. The DNRN then issues a certificate and legally charters the organization. A chaplain who is a citizen may serve in the armed forces. The law states, "Foreigners cannot provide religious assistance to the defense and security forces, except in cases of absolute need and urgency." Foreign citizen missionaries and non-missionary religious officials are exempt from paying normal residence and visa fees. Visa regulations are the same for all foreign religious workers, regardless of religious affiliation.

Recognition policy: a concordat between the government and the Holy See establishes a legal framework for cooperation, grants the Catholic Church autonomy in establishing and running schools, provides tax benefits, safeguards the Church's historical and cultural heritage, and acknowledges the right of its foreign missionaries to serve in the country. As part of its annual budget, in March, the Office of the Prime Minister allocated 15 million dollars to the Catholic Episcopal Conference of Timor-Leste for distribution among the country's three Catholic dioceses. The terms of the concordat with the Holy See governed the allocations. Other religious groups could apply for part of a separate two-million-dollar government fund set aside for non-Catholic religious groups during the year. The Civil Society Support Office also provided a \$200,000 grant to the Muslim community in October to support their religious activities and education. One Protestant community received \$40,000 in grant money to build a church in Oecusse, while another received \$32,000 to construct a church in Ermera, and a third received \$10,000 towards the construction of a church in Baucau. Non-Catholic groups continued to report tensions regarding unequal allocation of government funds.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, multi-registration, secondary procedure, tertiary procedure. As of year's end, the Council of Ministers had not approved proposed revisions to the civil code, originally put forward in 2020, that would register all forms of marriage recognized by law, including those of non-Catholic religious groups. Muslim, Protestant, and Hindu religious minority leaders again reported that notaries public rejected marriage and birth certificates from religious organizations other than the Catholic Church when submitted as supporting documentation required by individuals registering for schools and for other official acts. The leaders stated this occurred on an ad hoc rather than systematic basis, and authorities resolved the incidents by addressing them with the notarial office director. Members of non-Catholic religious groups had the option to marry in a civil ceremony witnessed by a notary public, according to a Ministry of Justice official. Registrations of births and marriages with the government continued to be available, but civil registration rates remained relatively low in comparison to registration for religious certificates. Protestant and Muslim leaders continued to encourage the Offices of the President and the Prime Minister as well as the parliament to recognize non-Catholic certificates. During the year, no non-Catholic chaplains served in the armed forces; however, clergy of other religions provided services on an invitational basis.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish differentiation between existential recognition and legal registration; forms of discriminations and harassment reported should be resolved through means of recognition; remove some of the administrative hurdles; to achieve Dynamic status, establish an independent recognition agency to manage the recognition system.

Togolese Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Togo is officially a secular state; however, preferential treatment is granted to the Roman Catholic Church, Islam and certain Protestant churches; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2007.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2007.

Human rights instruments: Togo is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Togo was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Togo did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad-discriminatory registration – the law requires all religious groups, including Indigenous groups, to register as religious associations. Some Christian and Islamic holidays are observed as national holidays. Official recognition as a religious association provides other groups the same rights as those afforded to Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims, including import duty exemptions for humanitarian and development projects. Registration entitles religious groups to receive government benefits such as government-provided teachers for faith-based schools and special assistance in case of natural disasters. Only the Ministry of Territorial Affairs (MTA) can issue authorizations to open new places of worship, and it issues the authorizations only to registered denominations. The law gives mayors and prefects the authority to close illegal places of worship. Organizations apply for registration with the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA). A religious group must submit its statutes, statement of doctrine, bylaws, names, and addresses of executive board members, leaders' religious credentials, a site-use agreement, map for religious facilities, and description of its finances. It must also pay a registration fee of 150,000 CFA francs (\$255). Criteria for recognition include authenticity of the religious leader's diploma and the government's assessment of the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order. The DRA issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition for religious groups applying for registration. The investigation and issuance of formal written authorization usually takes several years. By law, religious groups must request permission to conduct large nighttime celebrations, particularly those likely to block city streets or involve loud ceremonies in residential areas. According to the law, local authorities have the right to enforce noise levels and safety rules in places of worship.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, ambiguous qualifications are stipulated for registered status which could be easily misused against religious groups the status does not favour, delay of receipt of registered status goes far beyond what is permissible to RoRB standards (up to several years), excessive informational requirements, registration fee (\$260) far exceeds the \$100 threshold set down by RoRB standards (but has been reduced from \$280 from the year prior), there are approximately 900 pending registration applications that the government has not progressed. In September, the Director of the DRA, Colonel Bediani Belei informed religious groups that unregistered denominations were prohibited from opening places of worship. According to the DRA, more than 22,000 illegal places of worship operated in the country. Belei also announced days of worship for different faiths: Sunday for Christians, Friday for Muslims and Saturday for Seventh-day Adventists. He also stated loud worship of any kind was strictly forbidden from Monday to Saturday; wakes and funeral prayers must end before 8:00 p.m.; and muezzin calls to worship were only permitted in large neighborhood mosques. The DRA released a statement in July regarding several thousand complaints concerning the high level of volume of worship services and religious observances and announced sanctions would follow if noise levels were not reduced. Although there was no law or regulation prescribing a permissible volume, the MTA and mayors recommended acceptable decibel levels in their messages to religious leaders. The DRA stated, "The provisions of the health code, the framework law on the environment and the Togolese penal code are applicable to noise pollution generated by places of worship and engage the civil and penal liability of those responsible for these places." The announcement prompted mixed reactions on social networks. Some welcomed the regulation against noise pollution, while others complained it was too strict. Associations of religious leaders announced they requested meetings with the DRA to discuss the announcement. After they met, the government's position remained unchanged by the end of the year. Throughout the year, the MTA organized sensitization campaigns and workshops nationwide on the legal requirement for religious leaders to request permission from local authorities before conducting large celebrations at night, and the right of local authorities to enforce noise levels and safety rules in places of worship. The government continued to not act on pending registration applications from religious groups and since 2013, has not accepted new applications. Most pending registration applications were submitted by Christian evangelical religious movements.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (not free; rules on items for propagational use remain unclear); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Re-establish the recognition system in such a way that it extends existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives equally; dismantlement of the present body of policies restricting registration such as the relatively high fee; revoke the mandatory registration order and ensure that informational requirements are not excessive.



Tonga, Kingdom of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Partial claim is made.

Secularity: Tonga is officially a secular state; however, preferential treatment is granted to Christianity; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2013.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2013.

Human rights instruments: Tonga is party to the UNCRC; Tonga is neither party to the ICCPR nor the ICESCR; Tonga was absent during voting on UNDRIP; Tonga did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Tongan law does not formally mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government, the legal ability for religious groups to import goods for religious purposes is reserved only for groups that have undergone registration which in effect makes registration mandatory as this is an essential function of any religious organisation. The law does not require registration of religious groups. Any group may gather, worship, and practice their faith without informing the government or seeking its permission. A religious group, however, must register to be eligible for specific benefits, such as recognition of clergy as marriage officers; tax exemptions on nonbusiness income, importation of goods for religious purposes and fundraising; protection of a denomination's name; and access to broadcasting on public channels. Registration as a religious group requires an application to the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Innovation, and Labor, accompanied by certified copies of the group's rules and constitution, a declaration detailing any other trust in which the applicant holds assets, a witness's signature, and a 115 pa'anga (\$51) application fee. If a group elects to register with the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Innovation, and Labor, the law requires it also to register with the Ministry of Revenue and Customs as a nonprofit organization.

Recognition policy: the constitution requires that the Sabbath, which the government recognizes as Sunday, be "kept holy" and prohibits commercial transactions on the Sabbath. Only a limited number of restaurants and retail stores are allowed to operate after receiving approval by the Minister of Police. The law also prohibits many recreational activities and sports on the Sabbath. The law applies to both Christians and non-Christians. The law allows religious leaders to legalize marriages. According to the law, only marriages solemnized by clergy or religious officiants, who must be Christian, are legally recognized, and no other marriage is valid. Non-Christians unwilling to be married by a Christian member of the clergy have no legal options to marry.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, dual registration, possible nominal restriction ("protection of a denomination's name" is listed as a benefit of registration), signature quota. During the year, the government continued to enforce a law that prohibits retail establishments, bakeries, and most restaurants from operating on Sunday to comply with the constitution's prohibition of commercial activity on the Sabbath. Through special permits granted by the Minister of Police, the government continued to allow hotels and resorts to operate Sundays for tourists. The government-owned Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC), a 24-hour service, maintained policy guidelines regarding the broadcast of religious programming on TV Tonga and Radio Tonga. The TBC guidelines stated that in view of "the character of the listening public," those who preach on TV Tonga and Radio Tonga must confine their preaching "within the limits of the mainstream Christian tradition." There were no reports, however, of the TBC denying any group's request to broadcast on public channels. The government permitted all Christian groups to participate in broadcasting one free hour of services on the radio each Sunday. All churches were able to broadcast notices of their activities on six FM radio stations and three television stations (Television Tonga, Digi TV, and the Christian station Doulos Television Radio).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a revitalised recognition system that crucially provides existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives without discrimination; revoke borderline mandatory registration requirements and the imposed signature quota; to become classified as dynamic, establish a recognition agency that is autonomous of government control that is responsible for managing the recognition system.



Trinidad and Tobago, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Trinidad and Tobago is a secular state; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2007.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2007.

Human rights instruments: Trinidad and Tobago is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Trinidad and Tobago did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious groups must register with the government to receive tax-exempt donations or gifts of land, perform marriages, or receive visas for foreign missionaries. To register, groups must demonstrate they are nonprofit organizations, have operated for at least one year, and submit a request for charitable status to the Ministry of Finance. The request must include a certificate or articles of incorporation, the constitution and bylaws of the organization, and the most recently audited financial statements. Religious groups have the same rights and obligations as most legal entities, regardless of their registration status. They may, for example, own land and hire employees, and they are liable for property taxes and government-mandated employee benefits. Chaplains representing different faiths present in the country may visit prisons to perform religious acts and minister to prisoners. Foreign missionaries must meet standard requirements for entry visas and must represent a registered religious group in the country. Permits are valid for a maximum of three years at the cost of 500 Trinidad and Tobago dollars (\$75) per year. Missionaries may not remain longer than three years per visit but may reenter after one year's absence.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, delayed registration, longevity quota (1 year), non-response to the Orisha religious group's application in 2018. According to the IRO, the National Council of Orisha Elders of Trinidad and Tobago continued to wait for the government to respond to its registration application, pending since 2018 with the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs. The government continued to limit the number of long-term foreign missionaries to 35 per registered religious group; the IRO stated that each missionary application was dealt with on a case-by-case basis and the processing times varied. Missionaries that numbered more than the 35 individuals allowed per group could remain in the country for a maximum of 30 days. Some international religious groups, however, said more than 35 missionaries could remain in the country if they affiliated with more than one registered group, including nonprofit groups and charities. The IRO said religious institutions could apply to extend the stay of their missionaries, but there was no guarantee of approval.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to registration); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

To reach Receptive status, establish a revitalised recognition system that provides both existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives and at multiple levels of activity; to become classified Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that is autonomous of government control that is responsible for managing the recognition system; revoke the imposition of a longevity quota.

Tunisia, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

ForRB Claim: Partial claim is made.

Secularity: Tunisia is officially a secular state (Sunni Islam was disestablished in 2022); however, Islam continues to receive preferential treatment with the latest constitution from 2022 requiring the state to support and advance the purposes of Islam; the 2022 constitution states “Tunisia is part of the Islamic Umma [community or nation]”; theism was affirmed in the 2022 constitution; according to the same constitution, only Muslims can be elected president and “the state is the guardian of religion.”

Protections: Implicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2022.

Human rights instruments: Tunisia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Tunisia did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Tunisian law does not formally mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government, non-registered religious groups cannot “conduct financial activities such as charity work”, “publish reports and leaflets”, “organise meetings” and “engage in all types of civil activities” which are fundamental religious functions that in effect makes registration mandatory. Religious groups may form and register associations under the law to establish a bank account, conduct financial activities such as charity work, and receive favorable tax treatment, including tax-free donations from government-approved associations, provided the association does not purport to represent all believers of a religious group or use the name of a religious group. In practice, minority religious groups often reported bureaucratic roadblocks and government delays when applying to form associations. To establish an association, a religious group must submit a registered letter to the Prime Minister’s Office stating the purposes of the association; copies of the national identity cards of its founders, who must be citizens; and two copies of the articles of association signed by the association’s founders or their representatives. The articles of association must contain the official name of the association in Arabic and any other language used; its address; a statement of its objectives; membership criteria; membership fees; and a statement of organizational structure, including identification of the decision-making body for the association. The law requires that associations and political parties respect the rule of law and basic democratic principles. The law prohibits associations from engaging in for-profit activities, providing material support to individual political candidates, or adopting bylaws or conducting activities that incite violence or promote hatred, fanaticism, or discrimination on the basis of religion. An association may receive tax-exempt income from organizations, including foreign organizations that have a prior agreement with the government. Once an association receives a return receipt from the Prime Minister’s Office, it has seven days to submit an announcement of the name, purpose, and objectives of the association to the government printing office. The government printing office has 15 days to publish the announcement in the official gazette, which constitutes the association’s official registration. In the event the government does not return a registered receipt within 30 days, an association may proceed to submit its documents for publication and obtain registration. A foreign association may establish a branch in the country, but the government may also reject its registration request if the government finds the principles or objectives of the foreign association contravene the law. Associations that violate the law are first given a warning of up to 30 days from the secretary general of the government, who reports directly to the Prime Minister. If the violation persists, a court may suspend the association’s activities for up to 30 days. If the association is still in violation of the law, the secretary general may then appeal to the court for dissolution of the association. Under the law, associations have the right to appeal court decisions. Registered associations have the right to organize meetings and demonstrations, to publish reports and leaflets, to own real estate, and to engage in “all types of civil activities.” By law, new mosques may be constructed, provided they are built in accordance with national urban planning regulations. The MRA pays for construction of mosques, although private and foreign donors are also able to contribute to construction costs. Mosques become government property upon completion, after which the government must maintain them.

Recognition policy: a 1964 *modus vivendi* with the Holy See grants official recognition to the Roman Catholic Church. The agreement allows the Catholic Church to function in the country and provides state recognition of the church. The agreement, however, restricts religious activities and services to the physical confines of authorized churches and prohibits construction of new churches and the ringing of church bells. A limited number of Catholic schools and charities operate under the *modus vivendi*, but their financial activities are conducted through registration as an association and their affiliation with the church is not publicized. The government subsidizes mosques and appoints and pays the salaries of imams. The Grand Mufti, appointed by the president, is charged with declaring religious holidays, issuing certificates of conversion to Islam, attending to citizens’ inquiries, representing the country at international religious conferences, providing opinions on school curricula, and studying and writing about Islam, including offering religious guidance and issuing *fatwas*. The MRA suggests themes for Friday sermons but does not regulate their content. The government may initiate administrative and legal procedures to remove imams who authorities determine are preaching “divisive” theology. Provisions of law addressing marriage, divorce, and other personal status issues are largely based on principles of civil law, combined with elements of sharia. Laws of inheritance are principally based on requirements in sharia, but there are some provisions that allow for exceptions as outlined in the Code of Personal Status.

Key restriction tools imposed: bilateral cooperation agreements are extended only to the Catholic Church meaning that any non-Catholic or non-Islamic religion are non-recognised, broad grounds exist for the denial of registration of GFOs, excessive informational requirements are requested as part of registration procedures, nominal restriction. There is no legal prohibition against proselytism, however, the law criminalizes forced conversions. On February 22, police detained the president and vice-president of the Federation of Evangelical, Protestant, and Pentecostal Christian Churches after a local television station profiled “house churches” associated with their organization, according to a local NGO. The program described the churches as places where Christian sub-Saharan migrants gathered to worship. Authorities released the two without charges on March 10. On February 16, police detained a Tunisian Christian as he was exiting a church in Tunis, according to a local human rights NGO. Authorities questioned him about his religious background and books in his possession before releasing him the same day without charges. The Baha’i community’s continuing efforts to register as an association remained unresolved. A government prosecutor’s 2021 appeal of a 2020 court ruling in favor of allowing Baha’is to form an association remained pending as year’s end. Despite being unable to officially organize, Baha’is were active in civil society. Although the law provided for the right of freedom of association, observers stated the government did not always respect it, particularly regarding restrictions on political and religious associations. Some religious minority groups reported administrative delays and lack of government response regarding processing of association applications; some of the applications dated as far back as 2017. As of year’s end, the Baha’i community had not received a reply from the Minister of Local Affairs regarding a 2020 petition to establish a Baha’i cemetery. The government continued to publicly urge imams to disseminate messages of moderation and tolerance to counter what it said were threats of violent extremism. Since 2015, the MRA has conducted regular training sessions for imams on how to disseminate these messages. According to several local committees in charge of mosque operations, the government generally allowed the committees to manage the daily affairs of their mosques and choose their own imams, with the exception of imams for Friday prayers, who were selected exclusively by the MRA. Regional MRA representatives within each governorate were required to vet, approve, and appoint both the local mosque committees and the imams. According to an MRA official, the government standardized and enforced mosque opening and closing times, except for certain mosques with cultural or historical significance and very small community mosques. In 2022, the MRA authorized a department for religious minorities; according to a local NGO, however, the department had not started operations as of year’s end. Christian citizens continued to describe strong governmental and societal pressure not to discuss publicly a church’s activities or theology. Christian community contacts indicated that many Christians practiced their faith through in-home gatherings for prayers and services or mass. A local NGO reported that police targeted Christians who displayed faith-related objects – such as crosses and Bibles – harassing and questioning them. Christians reported the government allowed churches to operate within set guidelines and provided security for their services. The government generally restricted Catholic public religious services or processions outside churches as agreed under the 1964 *modus vivendi* with the Vatican; however, some celebrations outside of church buildings were permitted. On August 16, hundreds gathered in La Goulette, a suburb of Tunis, to participate in the annual procession of the Madonna of Trapani at the Church of St. Augustine and St. Faithful. Archbishop of Tunis Ilario Antoniazzi led the procession. Christian citizens and members of other religious minorities reported the government continued to deny them the right to establish a legal entity or association that would allow the establishment of an Arabic-language church or a cemetery that would serve Christian citizens. The Christian community, however, did not submit a formal request for an association or legal status during the year. Christian cemeteries existed for foreign members of the Christian community; however, the government required Christian citizens to obtain permission from the government to bury family members in these cemeteries. Citizens reported they generally did not request such permission due to what they said was a pattern of governmental nonresponse. Jewish groups said they continued to worship freely, and the government continued to provide security for synagogues and partially subsidized restoration and maintenance costs. Government employees maintained Jewish cemeteries in Tunis and Djerba but did not maintain them in Sousse and El Kef, where there are also small Jewish communities. According to Jewish community representatives, the synagogue of Tetouaine, which was placed on the national heritage registry in 2020, remained under state protection to prevent further degradation of the building. According to Jewish groups, police intermittently harassed Jews and discriminated against them in the south by enforcing stop-and-frisk measures. Representatives of the Jewish community reported that the MRA still had not responded to a 2019 request to establish a national Jewish community association, despite the Minister’s 2021 pledge to support it. At year’s end, the MRA had not responded or acted on the application. The Jewish community initiated the application to establish associations in order to better advocate with the government on behalf of Jewish community interests and to serve as an organizing body for the Jewish communities in Gabes, Medenine, and Tunis.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hieronymy** (not free; preapproval required for non-Islamic religious materials and items); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted; the law criminalises forced conversions which may be viewed broadly and applied arbitrarily in favour of the religion from which the person is converting such as a Muslim converting from Islam); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the present apparatus of laws restricting non-Islamic religious activity; establish a reorganised recognition that provides recognition and registration to all belief systems and their derivatives; remove all forms of subjective language from the legislation on religion and belief.

Türkiye, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Turkey is officially a secular state (Sunni Islam was disestablished in 1928); however, Sunni Islam receives preferential treatment by the government.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion and philosophical belief was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2017.

Human rights instruments: Turkey is party to the ICPR, the ICESCR, the UNCR, and the UNDRIP; Turkey voted in favour of the UDHR; Turkey is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although registration with the government is not explicitly mandatory for religious groups to operate, a group must be registered to request legal recognition for places of worship. Places of worship requires permission from the government for the construction or restoration of a new place of worship. When granted permission to construct or designate a new place of worship, municipalities do not need to consult with central government authorities in advance of their decision; it is against the law, however, to hold religious services at a location not recognized by the central government as a place of worship, and the government may fine or close the venues for violating the law. The leadership and administrative structures of religious communities do not have a legal personality, leaving them unable to directly buy or hold title to property or press claims in court. Communities rely on separate foundations or associations governed by individual boards to hold and administer assets and property. The law prohibits the establishment of foundations based on the religion or ethnicity of members but grants exemptions to foundations existing before 1935. Non-Muslim citizens direct these longstanding foundations, 167 continue to exist, the majority of which are associated with the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jewish communities. In practice, a religious group may successfully apply to register as an association; a foundation provided its stated objective is charitable, educational, or cultural rather than religious. There are 13 Protestant foundations (four of which existed before 1935), 39 Protestant associations, and more than 73 representative offices linked with these associations. The DGF, under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, regulates the activities and affiliated properties of all foundations and assesses whether they are operating within the stated objectives of their organizational charter. There are several categories of foundations, including religious community foundations existing prior to the 1935 law. Government guidelines published in 2022 enable religious minority foundations to conduct elections for members of their governing boards. The guidelines apply to 163 of the 167 foundations represented by the DGF and run by Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Jewish, Syrian, Chaldean, Bulgarian Georgian, and Maronite communities. According to the guidelines, the foundations must conduct elections at least once every five years to elect boards with seven members (an alternative odd number of members, minimum three and maximum 11). Voters must be members of the same minority communities as the foundations whose boards they are electing. Candidates must be citizens over 18 years of age, literate, and without certain types of criminal offenses on their records. Within Istanbul, minority communities with fewer than 15 foundations may hold elections on a provincial basis, while communities with more than 15 foundations must split their voting into three electoral districts. Elections must be overseen and administered by electoral committees chosen by the current board and approved by the DGF; these committees may include a maximum of two members from the current board, who must be community members but not candidates. If a foundation becomes inactive, the government may petition the courts to rule it is no longer operational and transfer its assets to the state. Only a court order may close a foundation of any category, except under a state of emergency, during which the government may close foundations. Several religious communities have formally registered associations. Associations must be nonprofit and receive financial support only in the form of donations. To register as an association, a group must apply to the provincial governor's office with supporting documentation, including bylaws and a list of founding members. A group must also obtain permission from the Ministry of Interior as part of its application if a foreign association or nonprofit organization is a founding member; if foreigners are founding members of the group, the group must submit copies of its residence permits. If the governorate finds the bylaws unlawful or unconstitutional, the association must change them to meet the legal requirements. Under the law, the governorate may fine or otherwise punish association officials for actions deemed to violate the organization's bylaws. A court order may close an association, and the Ministry of Interior may temporarily close an association or foundation and apply to a court within 48 hours for a decision on closure. Otherwise, the government may use associations and foundations by decree under a state of emergency. The civil code requires associations not to discriminate on the grounds of religion, ethnicity, or race. By law, prisoners have the right to practice their religion while incarcerated; however, not all prisons have dedicated places of worship. According to the law, prison authorities must allow visitation by clergy members of registered religions and allow them to offer books and other materials that are part of the prisoner's faith, provided the prisoner is a member of a registered religion.

Registration policy: the constitution establishes the Diyanet, through which the state coordinates Islamic matters. According to the law, the Diyanet's mandate is to enable the beliefs, practices, and moral principles of Islam, with a primary focus on Sunni Islam, and address public religious issues; it administers mosques. By law, its duties include writing the sermon delivered in all mosques across the country and the Diyanet-staffed mosques added each Friday, the Diyanet operates under the presidency, with its head appointed by the president and administered by a 16-person council elected by clerics and university theology faculties. The Diyanet has five main departments, called high councils: religious services, hajj and umrah services, education, publications, and public relations. While the law does not require that all members of the council be Sunni Muslim, in practice this has historically been the case. The government issues chip-enabled national identity cards that contain no visible identification of religious affiliation. The information on religious affiliation is recorded in the chip and remains visible to authorized public officials as "qualified personal data" and protected as private information. Older national identity cards that are still in use contain a space for religious identification with the option of leaving the space blank. The new cards include the same options for religious identities as the older cards: Muslim, Greek Orthodox, non-Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, or "other/unknown." Bahá'ís, Alevis, Yazidis, and other religious groups with known populations in the country do not have the option to select their religious group, requiring members of these or other religious groups or those who have no religion to leave the category blank or choose "other/unknown."

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, arbitrary enforcement, criminalisation of unregistered places of worship, group dissolution procedures are structured in such a way that they could be easily misused to force the closure of religious groups unfavourable by the state, prohibition of Sufi and "other religious-social orders" (tarikats) and lodges (cemaats), restrictive laws exist around the organisation of a religious group and what actions it may or may not legally conduct. The law prohibits Sufi and other Islamic religious-social orders (tarikats) and lodges (tekte or zavviye), although authorities do not enforce these restrictions. The case of nine Kurdish Sunni imams arrested in 2021 continued through the end of the year. According to media reports, prosecutors sought to close the organization to which the nine imams belong, the Religious Scholars Solidarity Association (DIYADER). The government charged them with terrorism-related offenses for preaching in their native language; the DIYADER's president was the last defendant under arrest until his release in January. Four defendants, including the president, were required to report regularly to local police (known as judicial control) through year's end. The government continued its longstanding policy of interpreting the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which refers broadly to "non-Muslim minorities," as granting special legal minority status exclusively to three recognized groups: Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Greek Orthodox Christians. The government continued not to recognize the leadership or administrative structures of non-Muslim minorities, such as the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, or the Bahá'í Faith, as legal entities. The government continued to prohibit the sale or lease of land to buy or hold title to property or press claims in court. These three groups, along with other minority religious communities, had to rely on independent foundations they had previously organized, which were overseen by separate governing boards, to hold and control each religious property. Multiple Protestant Church representatives continued to report bureaucratic difficulties in registering places of worship. Church representatives said they were obliged to continue meeting in unregistered locations for worship services because local officials did not approve registration applications and continued to impose zoning standards on churches, including minimum space requirements of at least 10,764 square feet. Officials did not apply this requirement to Sunni Muslim congregations, which they permitted to build worship facilities in malls, airports, and other smaller spaces. In addition, some Protestant churches reported local authorities did not allow them to display crosses on the exterior of their buildings. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses annual report, the group could not establish suitable places of worship because of zoning restrictions and building specifications specifically tailored to Islamic mosques. Despite a 2016 ECHR ruling that the regulations were discriminatory and impeded free religious practice, the report stated authorities denied or ignored the group's subsequent 57 requests for land allocation. Municipal and provincial authorities challenged or defied court verdicts supporting the group's rights by refusing to grant permits for Jehovah's Witnesses to establish places of worship and by closing existing premises validated by court rulings. On March 9, an Izmir court reiterated its earlier verdict in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses' application to register a place of worship. Municipal authorities previously had denied this permission but the court overruled the city in 2018. In 2022, a higher court granted the municipality's appeal. On March 9, the lower court reviewed the case and insisted on its prior verdict in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses' application. The municipality again appealed, and the case became re-entangled pending at the end of the year with a judicial board. In Konya, Jehovah's Witnesses opened a place of worship on March 27, which authorities shut down on July 20 after neighbors filed complaints against the use of the premises for religious purposes. The group appealed on September 19, and the case continued through year's end. The Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate and the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate continued to seek legal recognition, and their communities operated as conglomerations of individual religious foundations. While Alevis continued to state they are a religious faith that deserves government recognition as such, the government continued to categorize Alevi worship as cultural rather than religious and not to recognize Alevi houses of worship (cemevis), despite a 2018 ruling by the Supreme Court of Appeals requiring such recognition. In 2018, the head of the Diyanet said mosques were the appropriate places of worship for both Alevis and Sunnis. The government continued to permit annual and other commemorative religious worship services at religiously significant Christian sites previously converted to state museums, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Church of the Holy Cross near Demre, St. Paul Church in Antalya, the Church of the Holy Cross on Akdamar Island, and the House of the Virgin Mary near Selçuk. According to minority communities, this was often a pragmatic option at sites where local congregations were no longer large enough to sustain full-time clergy and staff. On December 6, for the first time in 10 years, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew presided over a service commemorating the death of Saint Nicholas in Antalya's St. Nicholas Church. The government continued to provide Sunni Muslim inmates in larger prisons access to mesjids (small mosques) and Sunni preachers. The government did not provide clergy in prisons for non-Sunni religious groups; however, their clergy could visit and minister to adherents with the permission of the public prosecutor. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses annual report, group members faced fines for public disturbance when preaching door to door or in public places, or for "occupying the sidewalk" with carts offering their religious literature. The report stated police falsely accused Jehovah's Witnesses of selling goods or services they offered free of charge. According to examples in the report, courts sometimes annulled the fines and at other times upheld them. On January 22, in Kartal District, Istanbul, police detained four Jehovah's Witnesses for preaching door to door, although the resident with whom they had spoken said he was not troubled by the visit and did not wish to press charges. The public prosecutor charged the four with "disturbing others to sell goods or services," although the Jehovah's Witnesses offered their literature for free; the prosecutor called for courts to fine each of them 617 Turkish lira (\$21). On May 24 and August 29, local courts upheld the fines. The charges were misdemeanors and therefore could not be appealed. On February 10, in Aydın, three Jehovah's Witnesses who were maintaining a sidewalk cart of free religious literature were each fined 1,295 Turkish lira (\$44) for "acting contrary to order." On September 1 and 12, a local court annulled the fines. On July 10, in Mersin, four Jehovah's Witnesses with a literature cart were charged with "occupying the sidewalk," and each fined 617 Turkish lira (\$21), while police confiscated their cart and publications. On September 6 and October 3, two local courts upheld three of the fines. The fourth verdict remained pending at the end of the year. The Diyanet continued to regulate the operation of and compose the mandatory Friday sermon given in all registered mosques, and it paid the salaries of Sunni personnel. The government continued to provide land for the construction of Sunni mosques and to fund their construction through municipalities. According to the Diyanet's most recent published statistics, there were 89,302 Diyanet-operated mosques in the country at the end of 2022, compared with 89,817 at the end of 2021, the first decrease in the number of mosques in at least a decade. In September, authorities charged an individual with "destroying public property" and "damaging places of worship" for entering a restricted zone in the Hagia Sophia Mosque and breaking a door to try to open it. The legal process against the individual continued through year's end. Separately, the government undertook broader renovations of Hagia Sophia, which remained open while restoration was underway. The restoration to address structural cracks and materials fatigue began with the imperial tombs in the garden and was expected to continue with one of the minarets and the main structure in the coming years. In October, Minister of Culture Mehmet Nuri Ersoy said the entrance to Hagia Sophia would not be free of charge for foreign nationals after January 2024, but upper galleries would then be reopened for tourists to view historic Christian Orthodox mosaics. The government again granted the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate permission to hold annual services at the fourth century Celsus Monastery in Trabzon. The government again did not permit the patriarchate to hold annual services at St. Nicholas Monastery in Cappadocia. The government continued to provide training for Sunni Muslim clerics while restricting other religious groups from training clergy inside the country. The Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox Patriarchates remained unable to conduct formal theological training within the country, and the Greek Orthodox Halki Seminary remained closed. Multiple reports continued to state Protestant communities could not train clergy in the country and therefore relied on foreign volunteers to serve in leadership capacities. Local Protestant communities stated they aimed to develop indigenous Turkish leaders in their congregations because it was becoming increasingly difficult to rely on foreign volunteers. Several Protestant clerics, including evangelical Christian pastors, conducted services while in the country on long-term tourist residence permits. The government continued its longstanding policy of not formally acknowledging the status of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew as leader of the world's approximately 300 million Orthodox Christians, although individual political leaders and government departments appeared to recognize it informally. The government's official position remained that the Ecumenical Patriarch was the religious leader only of the country's Greek Orthodox minority. According to a leader of the ethnic Greek community, this approach adhered to the 2016 ECHR ruling that the government was not obliged to prohibit the Ecumenical Patriarchate from holding services in the country and therefore relied on foreign volunteers to serve in leadership. The government continued to permit only Turkish citizens to vote in the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Holy Synod or to be elected patriarch and continued its practice of granting citizenship to Greek Orthodox metropolitans under the terms of the government's 2011 stopgap solution intended to widen the pool of candidates eligible to become the next patriarch. The government continued to maintain that leaders of the Greek Orthodox (Ecumenical Patriarchate), Armenian Apostolic Orthodox, and Jewish communities must be Turkish citizens. During the year, some Alevi representatives were generally dismissive of President Erdogan's 2022 initiative for the creation of an "Alevi-Bektashi Culture and Cemevi Presidency" within the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the ensuing decree formally establishing the new body. The decree allowed for sponsoring research and conferences on Alevi culture and providing material and administrative support to cemevis, including funding the salaries of cemevi leaders and covering operating costs such as utilities. Some Alevi saw the initiative as an effort to satisfy ECHR verdicts and an attempt to assimilate Alevis into mainstream Sunni Muslim culture.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (not free; restricted); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; restricted); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; restricted); public expression and observance (not free; restricted); receiving donations (not free; restricted); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration); religious instruction (not free; restricted); religious literature (not free; restricted); religious and worship services (not free; subject to registration); religious trade (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the present apparatus of laws restricting religious registration; provide recognition to all belief systems without discrimination; revoke all religious prohibitions and the criminalisation of unregistered places of worship.

Turkmenistan

2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

ForoB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Turkmenistan is officially a secular state; however, the Russian Orthodox Church and Sunni Islam receives preferential treatment.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Human rights instruments: Turkmenistan is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Turkmenistan was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Turkmenistan did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.



Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the law requires all religious organizations, including those already registered, to reregister with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) whenever the organization changes its address or amends its legal charter. The law permits the registration only of those religious organizations that have at least 50 resident members age 18 or older; a similar requirement applies to nonreligious civil associations. The law defines a religious organization as a voluntary association of citizens affiliated with a religion, organized to conduct religious services and other rites and ceremonies and/or to provide religious education, that is registered in accordance with the country's legislation. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are 134 religious organizations in the country, composed of Muslim (105 Sunni and five Shia), 13 Russian Orthodox, 10 other Christian confessions and one Bahai. By law, the State Commission on Religious Organizations and Expert Evaluation of Religious Information Resources (SCROEERIR) is responsible for helping religious organizations register with government agencies, explaining the law to representatives of religious organizations, monitoring the activities of religious organizations to ensure they comply with the law, assisting with the translation and publication of religious literature, and promoting understanding and tolerance among different religious organizations. The law states SCROEERIR must approve all individuals appointed as leaders of religious organizations, although the law does not specify the procedures for obtaining the required approval. The law also states leaders of registered religious organizations must be Turkmen citizens who have received an "appropriate religious education," but it does not define that term. SCROEERIR operates under the leadership of the Grand Mufti, who is appointed by the government, as are all other senior Muslim clerics, Sunni or Shia. The Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers for Education, Health, Religion, Sports, Tourism, Science, New Technologies, and Innovation oversees SCROEERIR's work. The chair of SCROEERIR is also the chair of the Department for Work with Religious Organizations in the Cabinet of Ministers. Except for the name of the chairman, the government did not make public the membership list of SCROEERIR or information on its deliberations. To register or reregister, organizations must submit to SCROEERIR their contact information; proof of address, a statement requesting registration signed by the founders and board members of the organization, two copies of the organization's charter, and the names, addresses, and dates of birth of the organization's founders. They must pay a registration fee that starts at 300 manat (\$86) and is based on the size of the organization and where it is registered. Once SCROEERIR endorses an application for registration, it is submitted to the MOJ, which coordinates an interministerial approval process involving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Security, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and other government offices. According to government procedures, the MOJ may additionally request the biographic information of all members of an organization applying for registration. Each congregation of a registered religious organization must also register, and the registration process is the same as that of the parent organization. The tax code stipulates registered religious organizations are exempt from taxes. The law states the MOJ will not register a religious organization if its goals or activities contradict the constitution or if SCROEERIR does not endorse its application. The law assigns the Office of the Prosecutor General to monitor the compliance of a religious organization with the constitution. A court may suspend the activities of a religious organization if it determines the organization is in violation of the constitution. Such a suspension may only be overcome if the organization submits documentation satisfying the court that the activities that led to suspension have ceased. The law also states that grounds for dissolution of a religious organization include activities "that violate the rights, freedoms, and lawful interests of citizens" or "harm their health and morale." The administrative code covering religious organizations delineates a schedule of fines for conducting activities not described in a religious organization's charter. Unregistered religious organizations and their unregistered subsidiary congregations may not legally conduct religious activities; establish places of worship; gather for religious services, including in private residences; produce or disseminate religious materials; or proselytize. Any such activity is punishable as an administrative offense by fines ranging from 100 to 2,000 manat (\$29 to \$570), with higher fines for religious leaders and lower fines for members. The law states MOJ officials have the right to attend any religious event held by a registered religious organization and to question religious leaders about any aspect of their activities. The criminal and administrative codes dictate punishment for private individuals who harass members of registered religious organizations. According to the administrative code, obstructing the exercise of religious freedom is punishable by a fine ranging from 500 to 1,000 manat (\$142 to \$284) or a 15-day administrative detention. According to the criminal code, obstructing the legal activities of religious organizations or the performance of religious rites that do not violate public order and are not associated with infringement of the rights, freedoms, and/or lawful interests of citizens is punishable by a fine ranging from 500 to 1,000 manat (\$142 to \$284), compulsory labor of up to 480 hours, or corrective labor up to one year, which entails the state deducting five to 20 percent of the individual's salary. If an obstruction involves a physical attack, the punishment may entail up to two years in prison. The law allows registered religious organizations to create educational establishments to train clergy and other religious personnel after obtaining a license. The Cabinet of Ministers establishes the procedures for doing so. The law also states individuals teaching religious disciplines at religious educational establishments must have a theological education and must carry out their activities with the permission of the central governing body of the religious organization and the approval of SCROEERIR. Local government offices have the right to monitor the "religious situation" within their jurisdictions, send proposals to SCROEERIR to change or update legislation on religious freedom, and coordinate religious ceremonies conducted outside of religious buildings. The law allows local governments, with the approval of SCROEERIR, to make decisions regarding the construction of religious buildings and structures within their jurisdictions. The law prohibits the publication of religious literature inciting "religious, national, ethnic, and/or racial hatred." SCROEERIR must approve imported religious literature, and only registered religious organizations may import literature. Registered religious organizations may be fined for publishing or disseminating religious material without government approval. The administrative code sets out a detailed schedule of fines, ranging from 200 to 2,000 manat (\$57 to \$570), for producing, importing, and disseminating unauthorized literature and other materials. The administrative code prohibits unregistered religious groups or unregistered subsidiaries of registered religious organizations from providing religious education. The administrative code sets out a detailed schedule of fines of up to 500 manat (\$142) for providing unauthorized religious education to children. The law does not address the activities of foreign missionaries and foreign religious organizations. The administrative code, however, bans registered religious organizations from receiving assistance from foreign entities for prohibited activities. The law requires religious groups to register all foreign assistance with the MOJ and to provide interim and final reports on the use of funds. The administrative code provides a detailed schedule of fines of up to 1,000 manat (\$284) for both unregistered and registered religious groups for accepting unauthorized funds from foreign sources.

Key restriction tools imposed: all aspects of religious activity must be preapproved by the SCROEERIR before they take place including the appointment of religious leaders, amalgamation, arbitrary enforcement, broad grounds for the deregistration of a group and the suspension of its activities leave groups unfavourable by the state vulnerable to having this grounds misused against them, criminalisation of unregistration, dual registration between the SCROEERIR and the MOJ, registration fee system some categories of which exceed the \$100 threshold set down in RoRB standards, excessive informational requirements will more than likely be misused by the state against groups is does not favour, lack of information is provided by the government over what criteria a religious group must fulfil to complete the necessary "endorsement" process as part of registration procedures, membership quota, nationality quota, permission to exist, preapproval, state definition of religion, state supervision, triennial reregistration. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)'s Turkmenistan Service reported that police in the Balkan province raided the homes of Muslims in mid-August 2023. According to the article, the police seized religious literature, including books on sharia and Russian translations of the Koran, and left only two Turkmen-language Koran copies. According to RFE/RL reporting, this was part of a larger continued campaign that included interrogating people who are considered "too pious." RFE/RL further reported that officials from the Ministry of National Security reportedly detained a mullah for giving religious lessons to about 50 school-age children. The RFE/RL article noted that, according to a local resident, the lessons followed Turkmen traditions for Islam. The article further reported that Ministry of National Security officials questioned an elderly imam for giving Islamic lessons to approximately 50 children without government approval. The Helsinki Foundation reported authorities continued to persecute Muslims believers for spreading the teachings of Islam, citing an example of a person detained for 15 days after authorities found CDs with religious recordings in the individual's car. The report said authorities prohibited any group study of the Koran outside of mosques or places not controlled by the authorities. It also reported the head of the BL-K/4 "Akdash" colony prohibited prisoners from receiving outside copies of the Koran. In their 2023 Religious Freedom Report, Jehovah's Witnesses reported 14 cases of police and officers from the Ministry of National Security detaining Witnesses over the year, summoning them to law enforcement agencies, at times while they were sharing their religious beliefs or in their place of work, questioning them for a few hours, and then releasing them. The report stated that the Ministry of National Security "continued to carry out preventative work among Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country." According to the report, "In almost all cases, the authorities ask the Witnesses to state their beliefs in writing, indicate that they have had an explanatory conversation, and undertake that they will no longer engage in 'illegal activities.' In some cases, the authorities have checked mobile phones and gained access to contact lists." The report noted that interrogations were "held in a respectful manner, although in some cases the officers have been aggressive." A local representative mentioned that in October, Ministry of National Security officers detained a Jehovah's Witness, questioned him for hours, and later released him, but did not return his passport. Some religious leaders reported satisfactory relations with government officials and fewer barriers to re-registration. One religious leader said a branch of a religious group in the region had not received registration approval despite several attempts over years. Some religious leaders reported that they were able to hold normal religious activities, including services and events, and that they routinely invited government officials to their activities. Other religious leaders stated that they struggled to find adequate spaces to hold their services, at times due to reported government pressure on the owners of establishments to not make their establishments available for religious activities. Representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses said that their adherents could only practice their religion by meeting in their private homes, which remained illegal, due to their lack of registration. The MFA reported the Ministry of Justice did not register any new religious organizations in 2023, as no requests for registration were submitted. Religious organizations noted that the registration process legally remained the same, and some mentioned they were able to successfully re-register. During 2022-2023, 18 organizations re-registered, 16 of them due to a change in their legal addresses and the other two for amendments to the organization's charter. One religious leader stated, however, that their organization was still waiting for approval of a registration application that was submitted to authorities three years earlier. The NGO Forum 18 reported that in August, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) expressed concern about "excessive administrative barriers to registering religious organizations (in the country) as well as the prohibition on practicing religion in cases where an organization is unregistered." CERD called on the country to "eliminate all barriers to registering religious organizations and practicing religion in cases where an organization is unregistered." Most religious organizations' leaders said they largely avoided importing printed religious literature due to restrictions and cumbersome importation processes. Some organizations' leaders said their followers accessed religious literature online and that some used smart cell phone applications to access religious literature. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported there were no imports of printed religious literature during the year. Members of various religious groups reported difficulty in purchasing or renting land and buildings for worship or meeting purposes, although they said they were unsure if this was government-driven or landlord-driven. Some reported that landlords said they feared government reprisal if they leased properties to be used as places of worship, and some landlords were allegedly pressured to refrain from offering their properties for religious activities. Some groups reported they had secured properties, only to have landlords renege on the contracts. A representative of a Sunni mosque said plans approved in 2022 by President Serdar Berdimuhamedov for the construction of new Sunni mosques in every province were still in place and advancing. The government continued to require its approval of all senior Muslim clerics. The government was not involved in appointing the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church or other financially independent religious groups but required the senior Russian Orthodox priest to be a citizen. The Helsinki Foundation reported that citizens wishing to make a pilgrimage abroad were required to apply for permission from imams. A source told the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation that "For several years now, the stated price for performing the Hajj to Mecca has been about 20 thousand manats (\$5,680). But at this price, only relatives and acquaintances of the imams perform the hajj. For everyone else, the price is from 80 to 200 thousand manat (\$22,720 to 57,300). But even with this amount, not every provincial will be able to leave, since most of the quotas are allocated to believers from my Akhal province." According to the Helsinki Foundation, after government authorities twice denied her permission, without explanation, to perform the umrah pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, Yakutjan Babajanova was permitted to travel in August. The foundation said the government granted permission after Babajanova's relatives appealed to the State Migration Service and international organizations. On January 15, the news outlet Turkmen Portal reported that Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Chairman of the People's Council, national leader, and former president of the country, inspected the construction of the newly established Arkadag City in the Ahal province. During the inspection, Berdimuhamedov noted the appropriateness of building a madrassah near the central mosque. According to the article, the mosque is expected to be able to accommodate 5,500 believers.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); hierarchy (not free; preapproval required for all religious materials and items); monasticism (not free; restricted); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; restricted); pastoral services (not free; subject to registration); private expression and observance (not free; although private worship is protected in law it is restricted in practice); proselytism (not free; restricted); public expression and observance (not free; restricted); receiving donations (not free; restricted); religious buildings (not free; subject to registration; restricted); religious instruction (not free; restricted); religious literature (not free; restricted); religious and worship services (not free; subject to registration); religious trade (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the present terminally restrictive apparatus that restricts all aspects of religious life in the society; reorganise the recognition system so it extends authentic recognition to all belief systems and groups; revoke all the restriction tools identified in the above analysis.

Tuvalu

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu (EKT) is the state denomination; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1986; the same constitution states the country is “a Christian nation” and “a free and democratic sovereign state based on Christian principles, Tuvaluan values and culture, and the Rule of Law.”

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “religious beliefs or lack of religious beliefs” was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1986.

Human rights instruments: Tuvalu is party to the UNCRC; Tuvalu is neither party to the ICCPR nor the ICESCR; Tuvalu was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Tuvalu did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: conditional mandatory registration – by law, any new religious group with adult members representing not less than 2 percent of the country’s total population (according to the most recent census in 2017) must register with the government; failure to register may result in prosecution. The Ministry of Local Government requires religious groups seeking registration to submit a request signed by the head and supported by five other members of the organization. Information on and proof of the number of adherents, the name of the religious organization, and approval from the traditional elder councils, known as falekaupule, are also required in the request. Under the law, all religious groups, regardless of size, must register with and obtain approval from the falekaupule of any island on which they conduct services. The law prohibits joint or public worship by religious groups not approved by these councils. The law also allows the falekaupule to withhold permission to meet publicly from certain religious groups, should they be judged locally to “directly threaten the values and culture of the island community.” The law provides for unapproved groups to be fined up to 500 Australian dollars (\$340) if they engage in public meetings in violation of the law. The law guarantees the right of individuals to worship freely within their own residences.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, arbitrary enforcement, grounds for the denial of registration are ambiguous and could easily be misused against religious groups that are unfavoured by the state membership quota, possibility for the prosecution of groups registered that fit criteria for registration, possible inverted membership quota, registered status is left up to the elder councils (falekaupule) to decide, signature quota. During the year, missionaries practiced without government restrictions on some islands, such as Funafuti. According to sources, on other islands, including Nanumanga, Nukufetau, and Vaitupu, formal and informal bans issued by the falekaupule remained in effect on proselytizing and on public worship by Jehovah’s Witnesses, who were perceived to challenge traditional cultural norms. Government ceremonies at the national and island council levels, such as the opening of the parliamentary year, included Christian prayers and clergy. Chaplains representing the EKT and other Christian denominations were available to prisoners for counselling. The government continued to impose a 15-minute pause on all public activities in Funafuti every evening so that EKT members could observe evening prayers, although prayer was not mandatory.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (not free; subject to registration); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the present series of laws and policies restricting religious activity, especially the laws that give prime authority to falekaupule to make decisions on religious activity and the internal affairs of religious organisations; if this cannot be achieved without the disestablishment of Calvinism, then this may need to take place; become party to and ratify the ICCPR; revoke the rule of mandatory registration and any retributions associated with unregistration; re-establish the recognition system so that its provisions are extended to all belief systems and their derivatives; to become classified as Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that is independent of the government to manage this re-established recognition system with the assurance that politicisation of the registration procedures does not take place and that such procedures are no longer restrictive.



Uganda, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Uganda is a secular state; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2017.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2017.

Human rights instruments: Uganda is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Uganda was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Uganda did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory**.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the Nongovernmental Organizations (NGO) Act states religious organizations and groups are obligated to register with the Uganda Registration Services Bureau and secure a five-year operating license from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Bureau requires religious organizations to provide a written copy of a board resolution creating the religious organization; a copy of the organization's Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association spelling out the organization's objectives and purposes; a record of the organization's directorship and shareholdings; copies of the national identity cards of the directors, as well as a copy of a land title or proof of ownership of any property owned by the organization. Under the Income Tax Act of 2000, religious institutions and their nonprofit activities are exempted from direct taxes but are liable for indirect taxes. The National Environment (Noise Standards and Control) Regulations of 2003 prescribe permissible levels of sound that may be produced by any person or body.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, broad grounds on which religious groups may be deregistered or denied registration in the first instance are based on the use of the securitisation of religion against groups the state does not favour, excessive informational requirements, fixed-term registration on a five-year basis (temporary registration). The law prohibits secular broadcasters from stating opinions on religious doctrine or faith. The law also prohibits radio and television stations from broadcasting advertisements that "promote psychic practices or practices related to the occult," material that encourages persons to change their faith, and content that uses or contains blasphemy, which is not defined by law. The government, however, seldom enforces these provisions. Observers stated the government often enforced registration requirements of the NGO Act on new religious groups. It, however, did not strictly enforce the act's requirements on larger and more traditionally established religious groups such as Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, and Seventh-day Adventist groups, and the UMSC. In June, the government requested and arranged the deportation from Ethiopia of 80 Ugandan members of a religious group, the Christ Disciples Church, who had travelled to Ethiopia early in the year, in anticipation of the predicted end of the world and in the belief, espoused by their pastor, that they would find salvation through starvation. An additional group of 90 Church members were repatriated from Kenya while enroute to Ethiopia. The Ugandan government described the group as a "cult" and launched a manhunt for the group's leader, Pastor Simon Opolot, who was reportedly still in hiding at year's end. The government enforced regulations on noise pollution in ways that appeared to discriminate against evangelical religious bodies, according to evangelical leaders. In February, the government issued a warning that bars, clubs, religious places of worship, and other places that hosted public gatherings risked closure if they emitted noise beyond the levels permissible under the law. Evangelical religious leaders under the umbrella group Born Again Faith Uganda (BAFU) stated since then, authorities enforced the regulation irregularly, with evangelical churches and street preachers particularly targeted for closure, while bars and other nonreligious operators were allowed to produce noise levels well above the permissible limit. In August, the Resident District Commissioner in Lyantonde District in southwestern Uganda, issued "guidelines" restricting evangelical church activities in the district. Under the guidelines, evangelical churches, as well as all other churches, were barred from holding any prayers after 9:00 p.m. "in order to respect other people's right to sleep." In practice, only evangelical churches had services that continued after 9:00 p.m. The guidelines also required all evangelical churches procure letters of recommendation from BAFU before engaging in any activities. In September, BAFU stated the guidelines were discriminatory and an infringement on evangelical churches' freedom of worship.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; broadcasters are restricted from publishing materials that proselytise); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Revoke mandatory registration and resolve the various internal issues of the recognition system; establish a revitalised recognition system that provides both existential and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives; this should also resolve the issue of there being a lack of distinction between religious and secular entity registration.



Ukraine

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Ukraine is officially a secular state; however, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) receives preferential treatment and is recognised as the national church; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Human rights instruments: Ukraine is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Ukraine abstained from voting on the UNDRIP but has since endorsed it; Ukraine did not vote on the UDHR; Ukraine is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory and malregistration.



Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although Ukrainian law does not formally mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government, the legal ability to establish periodicals or companies for manufacturing religious items or publishing arms of the religious group is reserved for registered groups. Religious organizations include religious congregations, administrations and centers, theological schools, monasteries, religious brotherhoods, missions, and associations consisting of those religious organizations. Religious associations are represented by their centers (administrations). To register and obtain legal-entirety status, an organization must register either with the Office of the President, State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience (DESS) or with regional government authorities, depending upon the nature of the organization. Religious centers, administrations, monasteries, brotherhoods, missions, and schools register with the DESS. Congregations register with oblast as well as Kyiv and Sevastopol City authorities in their locations. While these congregations may form the constituent units of a nationwide religious organization, the nationwide organization does not register on a national basis and may not obtain recognition as a legal entity. The constituent units instead register individually and obtain legal-entirety status. The law directs regional governments' religious affairs departments to handle dual registration. The law also specifies registration requirements for organizations that wish to change their affiliation, particularly Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UOC) parishes seeking to join the OCU. The law requires a quorum, as defined by each congregation and usually comprising two-thirds or three-fourths of a religious organization's members, to decide on a change of affiliation. The law also requires a vote by two-thirds of those present to authorize such a decision. The law bans any transfer of an organization's property until the affiliation change is finalized. To be eligible for registration, a religious congregation must have at least 10 adult members and submit to the registration authorities its statute (charter), certified copies of the resolution that created it and was adopted by founding members, and a document confirming its right to own or use premises. Registered religious organizations, which include individual religious congregations, administrative offices, theological schools, monasteries, religious brotherhoods and sisterhoods, missions, and religious associations, must register with tax authorities to acquire nonprofit status, which many do for banking purposes. Without legal-entirety status, a religious organization may not own property, conduct banking activities, be eligible for utility bill discounts, join civic or advisory boards of government agencies, or establish periodicals, nongovernmental pension funds, officially accredited schools, publishing, agricultural and other companies, or companies manufacturing religious items. Religious organizations without legal-entirety status may meet and worship and may also publish and distribute religious materials. In accordance with the stipulation against national registration, however, only a registered constituent unit of a nationwide religious association may own property or conduct business activities, either for itself or on behalf of the nationwide association. The law grants property tax exemptions to religious organizations and considers them nonprofit organizations. The law requires commanders of military units to allow their subordinates to participate in religious services but bans the creation of religious organizations in military institutions and military units. The law prohibits UOC priests from serving as chaplains on bases or in conflict zones. A law on military chaplaincy defines selection criteria for clergy to become chaplains: their status in the chain of command, and their rights and duties in the Armed Forces, National Guard, State Border Guard Service, and other military formations. The legislation institutionalizes military chaplaincy according to NATO principles, gives chaplains the status of full-fledged service members, and provides for the same type of financial and social security support for them as for other service members. The law protects the confidentiality of confession to a military chaplain and provides for the creation of interfaith councils on military chaplaincy as advisory bodies at the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Internal Affairs. According to the constitution, organizers must notify local authorities in advance of any type of planned public gathering, and authorities may challenge the legality of the event. According to a 2016 Constitutional Court decision, religious organizations need only inform local authorities of their intention to hold a public gathering and need not apply for permission or notify authorities within a specific period in advance of the event. Government regulations on identity documents, including passports, allow religious head coverings in photographs. The law allows religious organizations to establish theological schools to train clergy and other religious workers as well as to seek state accreditation through the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance for their curriculum. The law states theological schools shall function based on their own statutes. Government agencies authorized to monitor religious organizations include the Prosecutor General, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and all other "central bodies of the executive government." Only registered religious organizations may seek restitution of communal property confiscated by the former Communist regime. The law allows alternative nonmilitary service for conscientious objectors. It also allows government officials to deny a conscript's application for alternative service due to missing the application deadline. The law does not exempt the clergy from military mobilization. It does not grant exemption from military reserve service during the "special period" (i.e., while hostilities with Russia's forces continue), even for conscientious objectors. A 1999 Cabinet of Ministers resolution lists 10 religious groups whose system of beliefs "does not permit the use of weapons." The document stipulates only the men affiliated with those 10 groups are eligible for the alternative service: Reformist Adventists; Seventh-day Adventists; Evangelical Christians; Evangelical Christians-Baptists; the Slavic Church of the Holy Ghost ("The Penitents"); Jehovah's Witnesses; Charismatic Christian Churches and associated churches under their registered statutes; Union of Christians of the Evangelical Faith – Pentecostals and associated churches under their registered statutes; Christians of Evangelical Faith; and the Society for Krishna Consciousness. The law restricts the activities of foreign-based religious groups and defines the permissible activities of noncitizen clergy, preachers, teachers, and other representatives of foreign-based religious groups. By law, foreign religious workers may "preach, administer religious ordinances, or practice other canonical activities," but they may do so only for the registered religious organization that invited them and with the approval of the government body that registered the statute of the organization. Missionary activity is included under permissible activities. The law on freedom of conscience and religious organizations requires religious organizations with a "governing center" in a country designated by law as a state that "committed military aggression against Ukraine and temporarily occupied Ukraine's territory" to use the full title of the foreign religious organization within its name.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, localisation of registration procedures, membership quota, secondary procedure for non-profit status, some benefits of registration are "basic religious activities" and should not be dependent on registration such as establishing a publishing company or a company for the manufacture of religious items. A 2022 National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) resolution ordered the drafting of legislation "making it impossible" for religious organizations affiliated with centers of influence in the Russian Federation to operate in Ukraine. The resolution also required that the bill meet Ukraine's international religious freedom obligations. The legislation remained pending at year's end. Some UOC leaders, however, termed the draft law a "ban" on the UOC, which stated it had severed ties with the Moscow Patriarchate in 2022, with some international media reporting on these statements. In response to the bill passing its first reading, UOC spokesman Metropolitan Klyment described the bill as "a truly scandalous draft law containing many provocative provisions that contradict the constitution. It does not apply to the UOC. It applies overall to the religious organizations affiliated with Russia. According to all our statutes our church is not one of them." In an October 23 statement, the UOC, a founding member of the AUCCRO, described as "discriminatory" and "unacceptable" the government's decision "for the first time in Ukraine's history" not to invite a full-fledged member to the Prime Minister's meeting with the AUCCRO. The Cabinet of Ministers reportedly did not explain the reason for rejecting UOC participation in the October 19 event. In January, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv-Halych, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, warned the government against outlawing Orthodox communities linked to Moscow. On December 19, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk expressed his concern that the restrictions proposed in the draft law would infringe on freedom of religion and international human rights law. Some experts on religion stated that the government already had sufficient legal basis under existing laws to address religion-related security issues and there was no need to pass additional legislation. The UOC continued to report instances of "unlawful" reregistration of parishes from the UOC to OCU by some local governments. The OCU denied these allegations. Referring to the legal requirement that religious organizations with a "governing center" in a country designated by law as a state that "committed military aggression against Ukraine and temporarily occupied Ukraine's territory" the UOC stated it did not apply to its entities because of the church's declared independence from the ROC. On November 2, the Sixth Appellate Administrative Court upheld the Kyiv District Administrative Court's May 15 ruling rejecting a 2019 appeal by the UOC-affiliated Kyiv Metropolitanate and the Pochayiv Lavra Monastery contesting the applicability of a 2018 law to the case. The court found the UOC failed to prove its nonaffiliation with the ROC. The ruling also applied to 267 UOC religious organizations that were third parties to the suit. On November 12, the UOC legal department stated that "neither court decisions nor laws of Ukraine" required the UOC to rename itself and expressed its intention to appeal the ruling. Jehovah's Witnesses reported they continued in-person missionary activity. During the year, they documented 14 incidents in which government officials either prohibited or interfered with their evangelizing activity. They stated they did not file any criminal complaints with police, and most incidents involving officials were settled "amicably, through personal visits." On January 26, the administrative commission of Lviv's Lychakivskyi District acknowledged municipal officers Vasyi Tymchyshyn and Marian Vovk improperly accused Jehovah's Witnesses Rolan Stankovych and Marat Kupaiev of the administrative offense of setting up a mobile display of missionary materials at a public place in Lviv. The commission did not penalize the officers. On March 10, the state-run National Kyiv Pechersk Lavra museum served an eviction notice on the UOC monastic congregation requiring them to vacate the Pechersk Lavra Monastery by March 29. According to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, the eviction notice was for noncompliance with heritage preservation regulations, such as making extensive illegal renovations. The eviction also applied to the UOC administration offices, theological academy, and seminary based on the Lavra compound. Prior to 2022, the UOC was the only church with a monastic congregation at the Pechersk Lavra Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage site. In 2022, however, the government registered an OCU-affiliated monastic congregation at the monastery.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; subject to registration); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (not free; subject to registration); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Dissolve membership quotas and the segmented structure of the recognition system; establish more definitive procedures for existential recognition; reduce the convoluted within the present procedures for registration as minor issues within the present system; procedures for registration and recognition should be inclusive of all belief systems; also to be classified dynamic, a recognition agency would need to be established that is independent of government control.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: United Kingdom is a secular state; however, the Church of England is the state denomination of the country of England and is recognised as the national church; the monarch must be a member of and promise to uphold the Church of England; Scotland is a secular country but the Church of Scotland remains recognised as the national church; Wales is a secular country with the Church in Wales having been disestablished in 1920; Northern Ireland is a secular country; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “faith” was affirmed in the 1998 Human Rights Act.

Human rights instruments: United Kingdom (excluding Guernsey, Jersey and Gibraltar) is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; United Kingdom voted in favour of the UDHR; United Kingdom is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – by law, the General Register Office for England and Wales governs the registration and legal recognition of places of worship in England and Wales. A representative of the congregation, for example, a proprietor, trustee, or religious head, must complete and submit an application form and pay a fee of £29 (\$37) to a local registrar. The General Registrar Office typically provides registration certificates to the local superintendent registrar within 20 working days. The law also states buildings, rooms, or other premises may be registered as meeting places for religious worship upon payment of a fee. The General Register Office for England and Wales keeps a record of the registration, and the place of worship is assigned a “worship number.” Registration is not compulsory, but it provides certain financial advantages and is also required before a place of worship may be registered as a venue for marriages. Registered places of worship are exempt from paying taxes and benefit from participating in the country’s Gift Aid program. Religious groups may, but are not required to, register as charities with the Charity Commission on the same basis as nonreligious charities. Gift Aid allows charities to claim back the 25 percent basic rate of tax already paid on donations by the donor, boosting the value of a donation by one quarter. The law only applies in England and Wales. Citing a limited broadcast spectrum, the law prohibits religious groups from holding national radio licenses, public teletext licenses, more than one television service license, and/or radio and television multiplex licenses, which would allow a group to offer multiple channels as part of a single bundle of programming. The law requires visa applicants wishing to enter the country as “ministers of religion” to have a certificate of sponsorship for their job from a “bona fide religious organization,” proof of their knowledge of English, personal savings, and a travel history over the previous year. To qualify as bona fide, a religious organization must meet a series of criteria, including that it be a registered charitable organization and a faith-based community with a common system of belief and spiritual goals and that it not exclude anyone on the basis of gender, nationality, or ethnicity or breach the law or work against the public interest. The law defines “minister of religion” as a religious functionary whose main regular duties include leading a congregation in performing the rites and rituals of the faith and in preaching the essentials of the creed. “Minister of religion” includes anyone doing preaching and pastoral work or coming to the country as a missionary or member of a religious order.

Recognition policy: an estimated 30 sharia councils operate parallel to the national legal system. They adjudicate Islamic religious matters, including religious divorces, which are not recognized under civil law. Participants may submit cases to the councils on a voluntary basis. The councils do not have the legal status of courts, although they have legal status as mediation and arbitration bodies. As such, rulings may not be appealed in the courts. There are separate legal regimes for civil marriage and civil partnerships. Civil partnerships are formed when parties sign and register a civil partnership document, with no words required to be spoken. Civil marriages are solemnized by saying a prescribed set of vows. In England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, civil partnership ceremonies must be nonreligious. They must not include religious music or readings and must be free of obvious, specifically religious connotations. In Scotland, civil partnership ceremonies may be conducted by religious or humanist leaders. Nonreligious belief (i.e., humanist) marriages are legally recognized in Scotland and Northern Ireland but not in England and Wales, where “religious” marriages must take place in registered places of worship. In England and Wales, humanists must have a civil marriage alongside any humanist wedding if they want to be legally married. There are four categories of religious marriage: Church of England and Church in Wales (Anglican), Jewish, Quaker, and others (e.g., Hindu, Muslim, or other Christian). Anglican marriages must be conducted by a member of the clergy, who registers the marriage. Jewish and Quaker marriages are conducted in accordance with appropriate religious rites, and the officiant registers the marriage. In England and Wales, an Islamic marriage is recognized as a religious ceremony but does not provide the benefits of a completed civil marriage. A couple may be afforded the benefits of a completed civil marriage provided they were married under sharia in a country where this type of marriage is recognized by law or if they proceed with a UK civil marriage in addition to the Islamic marriage. Other religious marriages must take place in a registered place of worship, have at least two witnesses present, and include the necessary declarations; a registrar or a person certified by the registrar general (e.g., the imam) must then register the marriage. Twenty-six senior bishops of the Church of England sit in the UK House of Lords (Upper House of Parliament) as representatives of the state church. Known as the Lords Spiritual, they read prayers at the start of each daily meeting and play a full role in the work of the House of Lords.

Key restriction tools imposed: non-recognition for any religion or denomination other than Anglicanism, registration procedures are conducted by each place of worship while registration of religious organisation as a non-profit organisation or charity may be conducted with the Charity Commission. The pastoral needs of prisoners continued to be addressed, in part, through chaplains paid for by the UK Ministry of Justice, rather than by religious groups. All chaplains worked as part of a multi-faith team, the size and breakdown of which was determined by the number of inmates in the prison and their religious composition. Prison service regulations stated, “Chaplaincy provision must reflect the faith denomination requirements of the prison.” In 2022, the most recent year for which figures were available, there were approximately 257 regular chaplains in the armed forces, 256 of whom were Christian. There were 111 reserve chaplains serving in the military, 108 of whom were Christian. The armed forces also employed five civilian chaplains as full-time civil servants to care for Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, and Muslim service personnel. In November, the Ministry of Defense announced it would introduce nonreligious pastoral officers in 2024. There were approximately 1,200 prison chaplains in England and Wales, according to the government, though a breakdown of this figure by religious denomination was unavailable. In January, during debate in the House of Lords, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Ministry of Justice Lord Christopher Bellamy proposed replacing the prison Chaplaincy Council with a “Chaplaincy Faith and Belief Forum” representing all faiths, after stating that the council was no longer reflective of the “breadth of faith and belief of those in prison or on probation.” Humanists UK continued to say the state should increase the availability of nonreligious pastoral support in prisons and hospitals. Under the Places of Worship Scheme, which applied to England and Wales, the UK Government announced in June that places of worship would receive £28 million (\$35.6 million) to finance security, the same amount as in 2022. The funding was available through two programs: £3.5 million (\$4.4 million) for the Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme for non-Muslim sites and £24.5 million (\$31.1 million) for the Protective Security for Mosques Scheme. According to the government, these programs aimed to “reduce hate crime” at places of worship and to provide applicants with physical protective security measures such as closed-circuit television, secure fencing, and intruder alarms. Muslim applicants would also be eligible for security guard services. Then Security Minister Tom Tugendhat stated, “We will defend against any form of hatred targeting our communities and are committed to protecting all faiths.” The Places of Worship Scheme was open to places of worship listed with the relevant statutory listing agency (the British Listed Buildings for England, Scotland, and Wales or Northern Ireland Buildings databases) and that served “formally constituted religious organizations.” The sole exception was the Jewish community, which received £15 million (\$19 million) – £1 million (\$1.2 million) more than in 2022 – from a separate government grant administered by the NGO CST. The grant funded commercial security guards at Jewish community buildings across the UK with priority placed on schools. In October, the government announced an additional funding of £3 million (\$3.8 million) for the CST to support security equipment and additional guards at schools, synagogues, and other community sites. The UK government’s Listed Places of Worship (LPW) Grant Scheme issued grants covering the value-added tax on repairs of more than £1,000 (\$1,300) to listed buildings used as places of worship. In December, the government noted that nearly 5,000 religious buildings in the UK received a share of up to £42 million (\$53.4 million) in public funding during the year to support conservation of listed places of worship. This program is funded until March 31, 2025, according to authorities. The LPW, run by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport, focused on preserving cultural heritage, providing value-added tax relief on repairs to worship structures, turret clocks, pews, bells, and pipe organs, in addition to associated professional fees. All faiths and areas of the country were eligible for the plan, but the places of worship had to be listed in the British Listed Buildings or Northern Ireland Buildings databases. Humanists UK stated nonreligious belief marriages should receive legal recognition in England and Wales, as they do in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Media reported the UK Ministry of Justice stated that allowing humanist weddings would require the creation of a new category of marriage, known as “belief marriage.” According to an April report in The Guardian, television presenters Stephen Fry and Sandi Toksvig, along with the former chair of the Conservative Party-affiliated LGBT+ Conservatives group, Elena Bunbury, and her Labour and Liberal Democrat Party equivalents, wrote to then Justice Secretary Dominic Raab, stating that “legal recognition would have a profound impact.”

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarcy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to the registration of a place of worship); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a formal recognition system to set out provisions for both existential recognition for belief systems, denominations, communities based on a shared belief identity and legal registration for parishes to add to the existent provisions for individual religious buildings; restructure the restrictive laws on nuptial rites, namely making registration of places of worship a prerequisite for a marriage to be legal, to become dynamic, establish a recognition agency that is independent of government control but nonetheless reports to government and possesses the same authority as government in its area of speciality, namely the management of the religious recognition system.

United States of America



2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: United States (U.S.) is a secular state; the constitutions of 20 U.S. states affirm theism as does the constitution of Puerto Rico.

Protections: Although the U.S. constitution does not explicitly protect against discrimination on the basis of religion, U.S. law does prohibit religious discrimination.

Human rights instruments: United States is party to the ICCPR; United States signed the ICESCR but has not ratified it; United States signed the UNCRC but has not ratified it; United States rejected the UNDRIP; United States voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatory of registration: **optional**.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious groups are not required to register with the federal or state governments to operate legally in the U.S. However, religious or belief organisations are required to register with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) as a non-profit organisation to become tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, non-recognition for any religion or denomination.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; subject to registration); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a formal recognition system to set out provisions for both existential recognition for belief systems, denominations, communities based on a shared belief identity and legal registration for parishes to add to the existent provisions for individual religious buildings already in place; to become Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that is independent of government control but nonetheless reports to government and possesses the same authority as government in its area of speciality, namely the management of the religious recognition system.

Uruguay, Oriental Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive



FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Uruguay is a secular state (the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in 1918); the latest revised constitution from 2004 recognises “the right of the right of the Catholic Church to ownership of all temples which have been built wholly or partly from funds of the National Treasury, with the sole exception of chapels dedicated for use by asylums, hospitals, prisons, or other public establishments.”

Protections: Implicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2004.

Human rights instruments: Uruguay is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Uruguay voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Religious groups are entitled to property tax exemptions only for their houses of worship. To receive exemptions, a religious group must apply to and be approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) as a registered nonprofit organization. The ministry routinely approves these registrations, after which the group may request a property tax exemption from the taxing authority, usually the local government. By registering for official recognition and certification with the MEC, religious groups can receive benefits, services, recognition, and tax reductions from the government. Foreign religious workers must provide proof of certification from their affiliated religious institution to confirm the applicant’s identity and to guarantee financial support of the sponsoring religious group. According to regulations, the state must enforce these standards equitably across all religious groups. The National Rehabilitation Institute’s protocol regulates religious issues in prisons, including standardizing access to religious counseling and religious meeting spaces. Several prisons in the country have a dedicated space for religious practice.

Recognition policy: in deference to its secular nature, the government does not refer to holidays by their Christian names. For example, Christmas is formally referred to as “Family Day” and Holy Week is widely referred to as “Tourism Week.”

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation. According to media reports, in April, an Afro-Umbandist group filed a complaint before the INDDHH against the Maldonado Department’s government after local inspectors interrupted an Afro-Umbandist religious ritual involving the use of drums, stating that neighbors had complained of excessive noise. Members of the group asked to continue the ritual without drums and only with clapping, but the inspectors halted the ritual and ordered the group to leave the area. The Afro-Umbandists said the inspectors’ actions violated their right to practice religious rituals. A member of the Maldonado local council said local inspectors treated members of the religious groups as criminals. Representatives of the Afro-Umbanda religion stated there were other similar incidents throughout the year where state officials interrupted their rites, including rituals with drums and animal sacrifices. Some non-Christian religious groups reiterated they believed the government favored Christians, as evidenced by the government’s designating Christian holidays as official secular holidays, after renaming them, thereby automatically granting Christians time off from work to observe them. Representatives of the non-Christian groups said the government did not designate holidays of other religious groups as official, thereby requiring followers to request a day off using their personal leave to observe them and leaving the matter to the discretion of employers. Members of the Jewish and Seventh-day Adventist communities continued to advocate new government regulations that would allow students observing religious holidays or days of rest to take university-level examination on alternate dates instead of leaving that decision to individual professors. A report from one Seventh-day Adventist noted that even in cases when a university allowed a student to take an examination on an alternate date, the test was oral instead of the usual written one, which, she said, placed Seventh-day Adventist students at a competitive disadvantage. There were also reports of Church members who could not complete their university studies because some required courses were scheduled on Saturdays, without accommodating students on religious grounds. Throughout the year, Afro-Umbandists, Muslim groups, and other religious organizations asked the government to include questions about religion in the 2023 census to generate better data on religious identity that could be used when designing public policy. The government declined to add the questions to the census, citing the government’s official commitment to secularism, which it often interpreted as the absence of religion. Religious leaders welcomed the National Rehabilitation Institute’s protocol standardizing access to religious counseling and religious meeting spaces in prisons and expressed the need to have similar protocols for other institutions, such as juvenile detention centers and mental health facilities.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a reorganised recognition system that has the capacity to provide both existential recognition as well as legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives and at multiple levels of activity; to be classified Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that works independently of the government to manage the reorganised recognition system; to vest its authority within the agency, the government can establish it but then the government must relinquish its control of the agency afterwards to ensure the agency’s autonomy from government and thereby from politicisation.

Uzbekistan, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Uzbekistan is a secular state.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2011.

Human rights instruments: Uzbekistan is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNCRC; Uzbekistan was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Uzbekistan did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.



Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – all religious or belief organisations are mandated by law to register with Uzbek authorities before they may conduct any activities in the country legally. Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal. The criminal code distinguishes between “illegal” groups, and “prohibited” groups viewed as “extremist.” Organizing or participating in an illegal religious group is a criminal offense punishable by up to five years in prison or a fine of 15 to 30 million soum (\$1,200–\$2,400). The law also prohibits persuading others to join illegal religious groups, with penalties of up to three years in prison. The criminal code provides penalties of up to 20 years in prison for organizing or participating in the activities of religious extremist, fundamentalist, separatist, or other prohibited groups. Charges against alleged members of religious extremist groups may include the stated offenses of attempting to overthrow the constitutional order and terrorism. The government currently maintains a list of 22 organizations it considers “terrorist” that are banned in the country. The 2021 law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (religion law) further details the scope of, and limitations on, the exercise of the freedom of religion or belief. The religion law criminalizes unregistered religious activity, requires official approval of the content, production, distribution, and storage of religious publications; and prohibits proselytism and other missionary activities. This law provides a registration process for religious organizations that allows online applications. It requires an organization to have 50 founding members to register and stipulates all founding members must live in one district or city. It prohibits private religious education. According to the 2021 religion law, all religious groups must register with the Ministry of Justice; without registration, a group may not carry out any activities. The law lists a series of requirements, including having a permanent presence in eight of the country’s 14 administrative units for central registration; presenting a membership list of at least 50 citizens who are 18 or older; and providing a charter in Uzbek with a legal, physical address to the local Ministry of Justice branch. Religious groups applying to register in a specific locality require the concurrence of the CRA, a federal executive-level committee, and the khokimiyat (local government) for preapproval. Groups must submit “letters of guarantee” from the regional branches of the Ministry of Construction, the State Sanitary and Epidemiological Service, and the Department of the State Fire Safety Service under the Ministry of Emergency Situations. The 2021 religion law requires electronic copies of the documents affirming that the leading founding members have the religious education necessary to preach their faith. Denominations whose faith does not provide for a system of professional religious education are exempted from this requirement. All religious groups must report their source of income and obtain CRA concurrence to register. The law also requires that khokimiyats consent with the registration of groups in their areas and that a religious group present notification from khokimiyat authorities stating the legal and postal addresses of the organization conform to all legal requirements, including obtaining authorization certificates from the zoning board, sanitary-epidemiological services, and fire services. After checking the submitted certificates, khokimiyats grant permission to register to the religious group seeking registration. The Ministry of Justice has one month to review and approve, deny, or return the application for revision. The law states registered religious groups may expand throughout the country by registering new locations, maintaining buildings compliant with fire and health codes, organizing religious teaching, and possessing religious literature. The law limits the operations of a registered group to those geographic areas where it is registered. Even if it is registered in one area, a religious group may not expand to another area until it completes the registration process there. The law grants only registered religious groups the right to establish schools and train clergy. Individual Muslim clergy members receive accreditation from the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan. The CRA oversees registered religious activity. The Council for Confessions under the CRA includes ex officio representatives from 16 registered religious groups, including Muslim, Christian, and Jewish groups, whom the government appoints to serve as consultants. The council discusses ways of ensuring compliance with the law, the responsibilities of religious organizations and believers, and other issues related to religion. The CRA also monitors internet discussion of religion and reports materials it deems extremist to law enforcement, and it publishes and regularly updates a list of websites and social media accounts the Supreme Court deems to be extremist and thus prohibited to access. According to the 2021 religion law, organizations must notify the government of any planned religious activities not part of formal worship services, as well as all religious activities intended for children younger than 16, unless those children have been given parental permission. The law requires registered religious organizations to inform authorities 30 days in advance of holding nonroutine religious meetings and other religious activities at the group’s registered address(es). At the beginning of each year, every religious organization must submit a list of planned meetings to the Ministry of Justice. Any meeting outside that list is considered “nonroutine.” The administrative code requires all registered religious organizations to seek permission from local authorities and then inform CRA and Ministry of Justice representatives 30 days before holding religious meetings, street processions, or other religious ceremonies occurring outside a group’s registered building(s), including activities involving foreign individuals or worshippers from another region. Unregistered groups are prohibited from organizing any religious activity. According to a 2017 Cabinet of Ministers resolution, the law punishes private entities for leasing premises or other property to, or facilitating gatherings, meetings, and street demonstrations of religious groups without state permission. The law also criminalizes the unauthorized facilitation of children’s and youth religious meetings as well as literary and other religion-based study groups not related to worship. The administrative penalty for violating these provisions ranges from fines of 15 million to 30 million soum (\$1,200–\$2,400) or up to 15 days’ imprisonment. The criminal code punishes proselytizing with up to three years in prison and prohibits teaching children religion against their will as well as efforts to involve minors in religious organizations without parental permission. The law requires religious groups to obtain a license to publish or distribute religious materials. The law requires official approval of the content, production, distribution, and storage of religious publications. Such materials include books, magazines, newspapers, brochures, leaflets, audiovisual items including CDs and DVDs, and materials posted to the internet describing the origins, history, ideology, teachings, commentaries, and rituals of various religions of the world. The administrative code punishes the “illegal production, storage, import, or distribution of materials of religious content” with a fine of 20 to 100 times the minimum monthly wage (six million to 30 million soum in 2022) (\$490 to \$2,400) for private individuals. The fine for government officials committing the same offense is 50 to 150 times the minimum monthly wage, or 15 million to 45 million soum (\$1,200–\$3,600). The administrative code permits the confiscation of such illegal materials and the “corresponding means of producing and distributing them.” Courts issue fines under the administrative code. In instances where an individual is unable to pay the fine, courts may issue an order garnishing wages. The criminal code imposes a fine of 100 to 200 times the minimum monthly wage (30 million to 60 million soum) (\$2,400–\$4,800) or “corrective labor” for up to three years for repeat offenders. The state forbids banned “extremist religious groups” from distributing any type of publication. Individuals who distribute leaflets or literature deemed extremist via social media networks are subject to criminal prosecution and face prison terms ranging from five to 20 years. According to the law, individuals in possession of literature by authors the government deems to be extremist or of any literature illegally imported or produced are subject to arrest and prosecution. The law permits only religious groups with a registered central administrative body to train religious personnel and conduct religious instruction. Ten madrasahs, including two for women, and a Russian Orthodox and a Protestant seminary have official approval to train religious personnel and provide secondary education. The Cabinet of Ministers considers madrasah—granted diplomas equivalent to other diplomas, enabling madrasah graduates to continue to university-level education. The law requires imams to have graduated from a recognized religious education facility and to register for a license with the government. The Muslim Board of Uzbekistan assigns a graduate to a particular mosque as a deputy imam before he may subsequently become an imam. According to government officials and religious freedom activists, clerics from various religious groups who obtain their qualifications abroad may officiate within licensed premises.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, central registration is limited by a geographic quota, criminalisation of unregistration, excessive informational requirements intertwined with a membership quota, localisation of registration procedures, membership quota, multi-registration, nationality quota, non-issuance, preapproval, reregistration is required each time the group wishes to expand to different regions of the country, restrictive procedure for notarisations is a necessary precursor to receiving registered status, the registration permit “to train clergy” is classified as basic religious activity and so should not be subject to registration. According to Forum 18, starting early in the year, Tashkent police targeted Muslims through raids, house searches, detentions, arrests, administrative punishments for teaching religion without state permission as well as opening criminal investigations. In one incident, police reportedly detained a young woman they had previously targeted for wearing a hijab and studying Arabic. After 10 hours’ questioning without food or water, the woman, who is anemic, fainted. Police did not explain why they raided the family home, pressured the family, and detained the woman. Civil society groups continued to express concern that the law’s definition of extremism remained too broad and failed to distinguish between nonviolent religious beliefs and ideologies supporting violence. The government continued to frequently charge with extremism those who were found to possess materials included on the CRA’s list of banned materials. According to the government, during the year it pardoned 97 persons who had been sentenced for participating in the activities of prohibited organizations. Religious freedom activists said the government’s security services continued to fabricate charges against the press on multiple occasions, “show” of being tough on religious extremism. One prominent human rights lawyer stated authorities had charged some individuals with extremism based solely on incoming messages to their phones. Government officials said these messages referenced Hizb ut-Tahrir, even though the arrestees themselves did not write, forward, or respond to these messages. Religious activists again reported many prisoners sentenced on the basis of their religious activities continued to face extensions of their sentences when prison officials brought new charges, accusing inmates of involvement in extremist groups or other crimes. The new charges resulted in new sentences, and many individuals whose original sentences had ended years before were consequently still imprisoned. Although by law, only registered religious organizations may assemble and perform religious acts, many members of nonregistered minority congregations reported they were able to use the facilities of a registered congregation to worship without government intervention. Representatives of several Christian churches that in previous years had unsuccessfully sought registration reported they decided not to renew their applications because they could operate without obtaining approval. In April, Forum 18 published a report stating that authorities had raided the prayer services of the Council of Churches Baptist Church in Qashqi. The article said Ministry of Internal Affairs officials conducting the raid beat and used electric cattle prods on members of the congregation. Videos posted online by the International Union of Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches which the union said were of the raid showed authorities attempting to enter the church while congregants attempted to prevent them. Other videos showed authorities talking with apparent church leadership and ordering the musicians to stop playing. The videos and other sources did not show authorities using violence or the presence of cattle prods. According to Forum 18, the same church was raided in February as well. The government stated the services were hosted by the International Union of Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches (MSC ECB), an organization not registered in the country, and included performances by a group of Christians from outside the country. The government stated the MSC ECB did not notify the government of the planned performances as required by law, nor could it because the group refused to apply for registration. The government also stated residents complained to law enforcement about the large gathering. During the year, Jehovah’s Witnesses reported police detained members of their community for proselytizing. In the Jehovah’s Witnesses 2023 report, the group said they were not severely persecuted in Uzbekistan and were often treated with respect but stated there were several instances of what they referred to as “preventive conversations” with local law enforcement requesting information on religious meetings and leaders. The report stated that occasionally such local officials insulted, pressured, or threatened Witnesses, and that sometimes they pressured converts to “return to Islam.” Additionally, a Jehovah’s Witnesses fact sheet reported one of their members, Nadezhda Manatskova, was fined 1,650,000 soum (\$130) for “forcing a person to accept her religion.” The fact sheet said Manatskova “spoke peacefully of her faith” to a woman. International human rights organizations continue to criticize the law’s registration requirements for religious organizations. In May, Human Rights Watch said the government continued to unduly prolong the registration process and impose arbitrary requirements, especially for groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses. At year’s end, there were 2,356 religious organizations officially registered in the country, 197 of which were non-Muslim. The government reported it registered 13 Muslim and one Christian religious organization by year’s end. Jehovah’s Witnesses reported they continued to face what they described as insurmountable challenges to registering any new congregations in the country. Since the passing of the religion law, they reported trying to register two new congregations, one in Samarkand and one in Tashkent. In July, Jehovah’s Witnesses received a letter from the Tashkent City government, stating they were unable to register their Tashkent congregation due to repeated complaints from citizens regarding “missionary and proselytizing activities,” which are illegal. Jehovah’s Witnesses reported being the target of harassment and mistreatment due to the organization’s unregistered status, except for its sole registered community in Chirchik. The group continued to attempt registration in seven districts of the country. Jehovah’s Witnesses reported that local governments continued to block official registration of additional congregations for administrative reasons. According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, local agencies such as local branches of the Ministry of Construction or local fire safety offices, among others, refused to provide the documentation required to complete the registration process.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); hierarchy (not free; religious materials illegal); monasticism (not free; restricted); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; restricted); pastoral services (not free; restricted); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; illegal); public expression and observance (not free; restricted); receiving donations (not free; restricted); religious buildings (not free; restricted); religious instruction (not free; restricted); religious literature (not free; preapproval from the government required; restricted); religious and worship services (not free; restricted); religious trade (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the terminally restrictive and repressive regime of laws and policies that restrict all aspects of religious life for citizens and all operations of religious organisations throughout the country; such a dismantlement would first need to take place in entirety in order for any type of new recognition system to be established or reorganised.

Vanuatu, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Vanuatu is officially a secular state; however, deference is paid to Christianity in the latest revised constitution from 2013 leading to some special privileges; theism was affirmed in that same constitution.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “religious or traditional beliefs” was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2013.

Human rights instruments: Vanuatu is party to the ICCPR and the UNCRC; Vanuatu is not party to the ICESCR; Vanuatu was absent during voting on the UNDRIP; Vanuatu did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the law requires every religious group to apply to the government for a certificate of registration, pay 1,000 vatu (\$9), and obtain final approval of the Minister for Internal Affairs to operate. Registration allows the religious group to maintain a bank account. The penalty for not registering is a fine not exceeding 50,000 vatu (\$430).

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, arbitrary enforcement of the mandatory registration order, dual registration, fines for unregistered religious group can reach \$470 although this is apparently not widely enforced, government interactions with Christian churches were conducted through the coordinated body of the Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC). The VCC reported it continued to conduct prayer sessions, instituted in 2021, in almost all government ministries. The government reported it continued to interact with religious groups primarily through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the VCC, the latter composed of the Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Presbyterian Church, Church of Christ, and Apostolic Church, with Seventh-day Adventists and the Assemblies of God having observer status. Government officials said they respected smaller religious minorities but preferred to work with a coordinated body such as the VCC, which represented churches with the largest number of followers, stating that religious minorities had different expectations and protocols. Officials customarily took government oaths of office with a hand on the Bible. The VCC organized ceremonial prayers at national events, such as Father Walter Lini Day in February and Vanuatu Independence Day in July. Religious minorities, including officials representing the Muslim and Baha’i communities, continued to criticize the government for not allowing non-Christian clergy to lead ceremonial prayers at such events.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (free; laws on importation of religious materials remain unclear); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Establish a revitalised recognition system that provides opportunities for both existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives in order to be classified as receptive in the Spectrum of Religious Recognition; abolish fines for unregistration, the mandatory registration order and the imposition of dual registration; to be classified Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that works independently of government control that has the responsibility to manage the recognition system whilst also maintaining the authority that it requires to ensure that decisions of recognition and registration are respected nationwide.



Vatican City State

2024 RoRB Classification: Ambiguous

FoRB Claim: No claim is made.

Secularity: Catholic theocracy with the bishop of Rome as head of state.

Human rights instruments: Vatican City is partied to the UNCRC; Vatican City is neither partied to the ICCPR nor the ICESCR; Vatican City did not vote on either the UDHR or the UNDRIP; Vatican City is not partied to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **non-registration.**

Registration policy: there is no procedure for the registration of any religious organisation in Vatican City.

Key restriction tools imposed: non-recognition of any religion or denomination except Catholicism.



Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Venezuela is a secular state; the Roman Catholic Church is the only religious denomination to have a bilateral cooperation agreement with the government; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2009.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “creed” was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2009.

Human rights instruments: Venezuela is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Venezuela voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatory registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the Directorate of Justice and Religion (DJR) in the Maduro-controlled Ministry of Interior, Justice, and Peace maintains a registry of religious groups, disburses funds to religious organizations, and liaises with religious communities. Each religious group must register with the DJR to acquire legal status as a religious organization. Registration requires the declaration of property belonging to the religious group, identification of any religious authorities working directly for it, and articles of incorporation. Religious groups are required to demonstrate how they will provide social services to their communities and to obtain a letter of acceptance from the Maduro-aligned community council in the neighborhood(s) where the group will work. The ministry reviews applications, with no time limit for approval. Religious groups must register any new statutes with the DJR. The law provides for Catholic chaplains to minister to the spiritual needs of Catholics serving in the military. There are no known similar provisions for other religious groups.

Recognition policy: a 1964 concordat governs relations between Venezuela and the Holy See and provides for state funding for Catholic Church-run schools.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, dual registration due to the fact that Ministry of Interior, Justice and Peace is involved in registration as are community councils specific to where the group intends to establish its activities, excessive informational requirements (including a letter of acceptance from the regime-controlled community council), localisation of qualifications required for registered status, possibility for indefinite delay as no regulatory interval for the government’s review of applications is put in place, reregistration is required whenever the religious group adds any new statutes (such as new objectives), the proposal of new legislation to provide personal details of those to whom a religious group ministers raises concerns over the government’s intentions to restrict such activity or to intimidate group members. Religious groups reported they generally enjoyed freedom of religion or belief so long as they refrained from criticizing Maduro-aligned figures or policies. Many religious groups practiced self-censorship out of fear that Maduro’s representatives would apply the penal code or the antihate law that criminalizes political party activities promoting “fascism, intolerance, or hatred” to religious actors who criticized them. Catholic Church representatives continued to cite difficulties in securing religious visas for priests. They said many international Catholic Church personnel could not obtain religious visas and had to enter the country with tourist visas, which require renewal fees that represented a financial burden for the Church. Maduro representatives reportedly denied members of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) entrance into the country in July. USCCB had not been able to enter the country since 2016, according to a USCCB representative. In January, Maduro ordered CONATEL to create a technical working group to discuss increased access for evangelical Protestant churches to radio programming. In October, CONATEL ordered the closure of Catholic-associated radio station Radio Fe y Alegría, citing a lack of permission to operate. Observers said CONATEL issued the order after the station interviewed a politician who opposed Maduro. Maduro representatives continued to promote the National Religious Council they created in 2020. As part of this effort, they organized meetings throughout the year with the Evangelical Christian Movement for Venezuela (MOCEV), a pro-Maduro organization close to the PSUV. The ECV stated MOCEV was not representative of all evangelicals and that not all evangelical Protestant movements supported Maduro policies. Maduro representatives continued to disburse the “Good Pastor” bonus to some evangelical pastors via the Sistema Patria (Homeland System), a Maduro-controlled virtual platform on which many individuals must register to collect their salary and receive economic assistance. The bonus was reportedly 360 bolivars (\$10) and benefitted an estimated 13,915 evangelical Protestant pastors. On January 24, the Maduro-controlled national assembly approved in a first reading a law on the inspection and regularization of the activities and financing of NGOs and related organizations. If passed, the law would require civil society organizations, including religiously affiliated organizations, to declare their activities, sources of financing, and relationships with national or international organizations. Catholic priest Luis Ugalde, speaking at a press event with a federation of local organizations and network of 178 schools offering education in the most disadvantaged parts of the country, said if the law passed, many successful NGO initiatives could end.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a revitalised recognition system that provides opportunities for both existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives in order to be classified as receptive in the SRR; to be classified Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that works independently of government control that has the responsibility to manage the recognition system whilst also maintaining the authority that it requires to ensure that decisions of recognition and registration are respected nationwide.



Yemen, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: **Terminal**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Islam is the state religion and sharia is the source of legislation; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2015 and is also affirmed in the presidential oath; this same constitution states that the president must be Muslim.

Protections: **Implicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2015.**

Human rights instruments: Yemen is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Yemen did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: non-registration and malregistration.

Registration policy: non-registration – there is no provision for the registration of religious groups. The law prohibits NGO involvement in political or religious activities. By law, the government must authorize construction of new buildings. The law, however, does not mention places of worship specifically. The law criminalizes “assaulting the sanctity of faith” and prescribes up to one year’s imprisonment or a fine of up to 2,000 rials (\$4) to a person who “destroys or misrepresents or profanes a mosque” or other government-authorized religious site or disrupts religious rituals.

Malregistration – the ongoing Yemeni civil war undermines the government’s enforcement of the constitutional protections for religious communities.

Recognition policy: the constitution states that the president must be a Muslim who “practices his Islamic duties”; however, it allows non-Muslims to run for parliament, as long as they “fulfil their religious duties.”

Key restriction tools imposed: apostasy laws, criminalisation of the criticism of religion, non-recognition for any non-Islamic religion or denomination as well as some Islamic new religious movements, proselytising Muslims is prohibited, the importation of religious materials (hieroncy) for propagational purposes is prohibited, the state must authorise the construction of any new buildings in the country (which is presumed to include places of worship and other kinds of religious buildings). The law prohibits proselytizing directed at Muslims. Government authorities reportedly permitted prisoners and detainees to engage in Islamic religious observances but prevented religious minorities from practicing their faiths. In March, the NGO Freedom House released the Freedom in the World 2023 report. In it, the NGO stated that assassinations and other violent attacks on clerics had increased since regional powers escalated the civil war in 2015 and that combatants from all sides of the conflict had destroyed many religious buildings across the country. Freedom House stated there were reports that government-affiliated forces allegedly seized or destroyed Shia religious sites. Members of the Jewish community were not eligible to serve in the military or national government. Authorities forbade them from carrying the ceremonial national dagger.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; illegal to convert from Islam); **hieroncy** (not free; non-Islamic religious materials illegal); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; illegal to proselytise Muslims); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the present apparatus of laws restricting all forms of non-Islamic religious practice and belief; blasphemy, conversion and proselytism are all terminally restricted and normativism perpetuates these restrictions which means that more sophisticated means of religious recognition and religious education should be established to resolve issues of normativism; establish a recognition system for the country in order to provide existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives.

Zambia, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Christianity is the state religion; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Protections: Implicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “creed” was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2016.

Human rights instruments: Zambia is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Zambia did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.



Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – all religious groups are required to affiliate with an umbrella body, often referred to as a “mother body,” which gathers individual churches and denominations under one administrative authority. There are 14 mother bodies, seven Christian and seven non-Christian. These are the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB), Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ), Independent Churches of Zambia, Apostles Council of Churches, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Christian Missions in Many Lands, Islamic Supreme Council of Zambia (IS CZ), Hindu Association of Zambia, Guru Nanak Council of Zambia, Jewish Board of Deputies Zambia, Rastafarians, Council for Zambia Jewry, and Baha’i Faith in Zambia. The largest mother bodies are the ZCCB, EFZ, and CCZ. The Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security retains the discretion to register any religious entity. To register, a group must have a unique name, a recommendation letter from its mother body, and a document listing the clergy’s professional qualifications from a “recognized and reputable” theological school, but the government provides no specific definition or list of qualifying institutions. The Office of the Chief Registrar of Societies then conducts a preliminary assessment of the applicant group’s authenticity and religious purpose as well as a security check. Religious groups must pay a one-time fee of 3,000 kwacha (\$120) to establish registration and 100 kwacha (\$4) every year to retain it. Registered religious groups are also required to adhere to laws pertaining to employment practices and criminal conduct. The Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security has the legal authority to revoke the registration of religious groups. Grounds for revocation include failure to pay registration fees or the Minister’s assessment that the group has professed purposes, or has taken, or intends to take actions that run counter to the interests of “peace, welfare, or good order.” Groups may appeal the Minister’s finding in the courts. The government has the authority to levy fines and prison sentences of up to seven years against unregistered religious groups and their members. The law provides for privileged tax treatment for public benefit organizations, including religious groups, provided they are established for the promotion of religion, education, and relief of poverty or other distress. The Department of Immigration under the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security has a mandate to approve or deny permits and visas for travelers coming into the country for religious activities. For any foreign clergy entering the country, the sponsoring religious group must provide proof of legal registration as a religious group in the country, a recommendation letter from their aligned mother body, and clearance from clergy in the country of origin. This documentation is presented to the Department of Immigration.

Key restriction tools imposed: criminalisation of unregistration leading to possible fines and imprisonment for up to seven years for both group leaders and group members, grounds for deregistration are ambiguous and could easily be misused against religious groups unfavoured by the state, multi-registration, nominal restriction, recognition is granted through a restrictive system of umbrella “mother bodies”, registration fee of \$210 exceeds the \$100 threshold set down by RoRB standards, restrictive qualifications are demanded for registered status. Through statements by the President and various government ministers, the government confirmed Zambia’s position as a Christian nation, and reiterated its willingness to continue partnering with the religious community in ensuring Zambia upheld “Christian values.” In a speech read on the Vice President’s behalf on July 1, Mines and Minerals Development Minister Paul Kabuswe, said the government remained committed to working with and supporting the religious community in its efforts to provide moral guidance and charity to the people. Throughout the year, the government expressed commitment to developing self-regulatory frameworks for church and religious umbrella groups, promoting interdenominational dialogue, preserving religious heritage sites, and coordinating public religious celebrations, through the Office of the Vice President. These included the commemoration of Zambia’s declaration as a Christian nation (December 29), the National Day of Prayer, Fasting, and Repentance (October 18), and World Prayer Day (first Friday in March). The government again did not register any new mother bodies during the year. A moratorium imposed in 2019 on the registration of new churches and religious groups remained in force pending adoption of a new policy on minimum standards for churches and religious groups that would be included in the government’s framework for registering churches. At year’s end, the government had not announced a new policy. On December 29, the country commemorated its 1992 declaration as a Christian nation. During the event to mark the declaration, President Hichilema emphasized the critical role Christianity played in shaping the country’s values and fostering peace.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hieronymy** (not free; possibly subject to registration); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the present apparatus of laws restricting the registration of religious groups; establish a recognition agency to manage the recognition system in a capacity independent of government; this in order for the country to qualify for being dynamic; the “mother body” structure can remain in place but clear and non-onerous procedures must be put in place for alternative belief systems to establish their own mother bodies.

Zimbabwe, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Zimbabwe is officially a secular state; however, Christianity receives preferential treatment; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2013 and is also affirmed in the national pledge.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2013.

Human rights instruments: Zimbabwe is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Zimbabwe did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – Zimbabwean law does not mandate that religious or belief organisations register with the government to operate legally. The government does not require religious groups to register, although religious groups operating schools or medical facilities must register those institutions with the appropriate ministry. Religious groups, as well as schools and medical facilities run by religious groups, may receive tax-exempt status. Income earned by churches and religious institutions from trade and investments, however, is subject to taxes. Religious groups may apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges with the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority, which generally grants these requests. To obtain tax-exempt status, a group is required to bring a letter of approval from a church umbrella organization confirming the group's status as a religious group. Examples of organizations that can approve such letters include the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), the Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe, and the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs in Zimbabwe (SCIAZ). The Zimbabwe Revenue Authority generally grants a certificate of tax-exempt status within two to three days of receipt. The law requires all international NGOs registered as Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs), including religiously affiliated NGOs, to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the government defining the NGO's activities and zones of geographic coverage. The law stipulates international NGOs "shall not digress into programs that are not specified in the MOU as agreed upon by line ministries and registered by the Registrar." Local NGOs, including those that are faith-based, have no legal requirements to sign an MOU with the government but are required by law to notify local authorities of their intended operations prior to their registration. The law gives the government the authority to "deregister any private voluntary organization that fails to comply with its conditions of registration."

Recognition policy: the law explicitly recognizes the roles of faith leaders practicing Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and "any religion" to solemnize marriages according to the rites of their respective faiths.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, baseless denials of registration (e.g. Humanist Society of Zimbabwe), dual registration, GFOS must follow a different registration procedure to local groups, grounds for deregistration are ambiguous enough to be misused by the state against groups it does not favour, registration procedures are based on a restrictive umbrella body system in which religious groups must achieve a letter of approval from one of the government-approved umbrella bodies and present this letter as part of their registration application to the government. Religious and civil society groups reported increased government monitoring of public events, prayer rallies, church congregations, and activities of religiously affiliated NGOs perceived to be critical of the government. NGOs and religious leaders continued to report security services targeted some religious officials who engaged in political discourse perceived as negative toward the government. One religious leader stated while the government respected freedom of worship, it did not respect freedom of speech, which forced some religious leaders to self-censor their speeches. Another religious leader reported receiving phone calls from unknown persons warning religious leaders to be careful of what they say in sermons and in messages in pastoral letters. According to the religious leader, in some cases the unknown callers told religious leaders, "We are watching your statements." In September 2023, President Mnangagwa encouraged Parliament to prioritize finalizing amendments to the PVO Act. Members of civil society groups, said if passed in the current draft, the amendments would require all trusts, including faith-based organizations, to register as PVOs. According to the representatives, the amendments would increase reporting requirements for PVOs, impose vague and potentially arbitrary registration requirements that could limit legitimate civil society work, ban immoral or illegitimate funding sources (without defining what these are), criminalize work perceived to support or work against any political party or candidate, set civil and criminal penalties for lack of compliance, and allow the government to suspend board members and replace them with government-appointed trustees who could control a PVO's funding and operations, with few limitations. A religious leader stated the government explained the rationale behind the PVO Act was to curb money laundering by some unscrupulous businesses registered as trusts. A different leader stated President Mnangagwa delayed signing the bill in the previous session of parliament because of submissions from civil society and church leaders highlighting its likely negative implications. The religious leader said he and other religious leaders planned to engage parliamentarians to urge them to reject the bill once parliamentary debate began. The government continued to enforce a 2018 ban on all radio and state-run television programs advertising prophets and traditional healing, for example selling "tickets to heaven" or a traditional cure for HIV/AIDS. Sources said, however, that the proliferation of online media made these bans less effective.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (not free; subject to registration); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

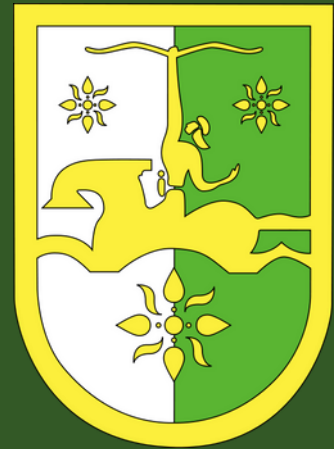
Establish a reorganised recognition system that has the capacity to provide both existential recognition and legal registration; the umbrella body structure can remain as long as it is no longer used as a means of restriction and therefore only on the stipulation that it is expanded to include all belief systems to ensure that more diversity is allowed in the country; revoke the dual registration policy and the misuse of broad grounds for deregistration against unfavoured religious groups; to become Dynamic, establish a recognition agency independent of the government that manages the established recognition system.



RECOGNITION AND REGISTRATION POLICY BY DEPENDENT OR DISPUTED TERRITORY

Abkhazia, Republic of

Conditions of state recognition and registration



2024 RoRB Classification: **Censorious**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Abkhazia is officially a secular territory; however, the Abkhazian Orthodox Church, which declared its independence from the Georgian Orthodox Church in 2009, receives preferential treatment.

Protections: **Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1999.**

Human rights instruments: Abkhazia is party to the UNCRC; Abkhazia is neither party to the ICCPR nor the ICESCR; Abkhazia did not vote on the UDHR or the UNDRIP; Abkhazia is not party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – influenced by Russian law, Abkhazian authorities mandate that all religious or belief organisations must register and notify authorities of their activities to operate legally in the occupied territory.

Key restriction tools imposed: prohibition of Jehovah's Witnesses since 1995 although this is not strictly enforced by the territory, some religious figures in Abkhazia continued to support turning the region's Orthodox churches into an autocephalous Abkhaz Orthodox Church, sources said the Russian Orthodox Church tacitly supported the autocephalic ambitions of breakaway churches without seeking formal recognition of their autocephaly from the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC). In Abkhazia, de facto authorities prohibited GOC clergy from entering the region. Most GOC worshippers in Abkhazia were unable to travel to Tbilisi-administered territory to celebrate Orthodox Christmas or Orthodox Easter due to lacking Abkhazia "passports."

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarcy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Revoke the prohibition of Jehovah's Witnesses and any other form of religious prohibition.

American Samoa



2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: American Samoa is a secular territory; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1967; theism is affirmed in the national oath.

Protections: Implicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1967.

Human rights instruments: American Samoa is party to the UNCRC; American Samoa is neither party to the ICCPR nor the ICESCR; American Samoa did not vote on the UDHR or the UNDRIP.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not obligated by law to register with the government to operate legally in American Samoa.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Anguilla



2024 RoRB Classification: **Apathetic**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: **Anguilla is a secular territory.**

Protections: **Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “creed” was affirmed in the Anguilla Constitution Order 1982.**

Human rights instruments: **Anguilla is partied to the UNCRC; Anguilla is neither partied to the ICCPR nor the ICESCR; Anguilla did not vote on the UDHR or the UNDRIP; Anguilla is partied to the ECHR.**

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government in order to operate legally in Anguilla.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Aruba, Country of

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Aruba is a secular territory.



Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1986.

Human rights instruments: Aruba is partied to the UNCRC; Aruba is also partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR and the UNDRIP via the Netherlands; Aruba did not vote on the UDHR; Aruba is partied to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional**.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government in order to operate legally in Aruba.

Basic religious activities

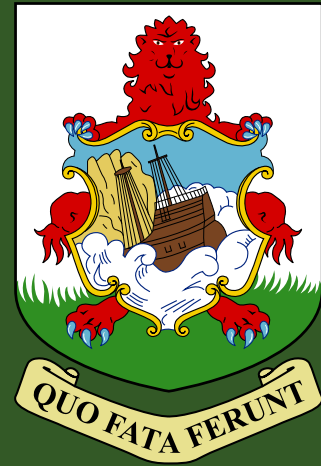
Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Bermuda

2024 RoRB Classification: **Apathetic**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: **Bermuda is a secular territory; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance and judicial oath.**



Protections: **Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “creed” was affirmed in the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968.**

Human rights instruments: **Bermuda is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP either by its own ratification or via the United Kingdom; United Kingdom voted in favour of the UDHR; Bermuda is party to the ECHR.**

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Bermuda.

Recognition policy: in Bermuda, laws support the legality of religious marriages, including Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Baha’i marriages. The law supports civil unions for heterosexual and same-sex couples. Civil union ceremonies must be performed by the registrar general, deputy registrar, or domestic partnership officer, with two witnesses.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

British Virgin Islands



2024 RoRB Classification: **Apathetic**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: British Virgin Islands is a secular territory; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2007; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2007.

Human rights instruments: British Virgin Islands is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP either by its own ratification or via the United Kingdom; United Kingdom voted in favour of the UDHR; British Virgin Islands is partied to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in the British Virgin Islands.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Cayman Islands



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Cayman Islands is a secular territory; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the Cayman Islands Constitution Order 2009.

Human rights instruments: Cayman Islands is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP either by its own ratification or via the United Kingdom; United Kingdom voted in favour of the UDHR; Cayman Islands is party to the ECHR.

Mandatory of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in the Cayman Islands.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Cook Islands



2024 RoRB Classification: Restrictive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Cook Islands is a secular territory; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1965.

Human rights instruments: Cook Islands is party to the UNCRC; Cook Islands is not party to the ICCPR or the ICESCR; Cook Islands did not vote on the UDHR or the UNDRIP.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: registration is directly controlled by the prime minister.

Key restriction tools imposed: authoritative decree (by way of the prime minister's direct approval of a religious group).

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Revoke the prime minister's exercise of an authoritative decree.

Crimea, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.



Secularity: Crimea is officially a secular territory; however, the Russian Orthodox Church receives preferential treatment.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: mandatory registration – the Russian occupying focuses have instituted a mandatory registration policy for religious groups in Crimea that much reflects the mandatory registration order enforced throughout Russia.

Key restriction tools imposed: forced reregistration under new rules which sharply reduced the number of registered groups in the territory, mass deregistration of religious groups, Russia's exportation of worst practice regarding religious recognition and registration procedures.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hieroncy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; illegal); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Denounce the forced reregistration and deregistration orders; denounce the Russian Federation's exportation of worst practice in Crimea on matters regarding religious activity.

Curaçao, Country of

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Curaçao is a secular territory.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2010.

Human rights instruments: Curaçao is partied to the UNCRC; Curaçao is partied to the ICCPR and the ICESCR via the Netherlands; Curaçao did not vote on either the UDHR or the UNDRIP; Curaçao is partied to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional**.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Curaçao.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Eastern Donbas

2024 RoRB Classification: **Terminal**

ForB Claim: **Explicit claim is made in the draft constitutions of both Republics.**

Secularity: **Donetsk and Luhansk are both officially secular territories; however, the Russian Orthodox Church receives preferential treatment.**

Protections: **Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the latest constitution for the Donetsk People's Republic from 2014.**

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory.**

Registration policy: **mandatory registration – the Russian Federation applies its own registration laws in the territory its occupies in Eastern Donbas.**

Key restriction tools imposed: **mass deregistration, police raids, prohibition of Jehovah's Witnesses since 2018, Russia's exportation of worst practice regarding religious recognition and registration procedures.**

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarcy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; illegal); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Denounce the deregistration order; denounce the Russian Federation's exportation of worst practice into the Donbas on matters regarding religious activity; revoke the prohibition of Jehovah's Witnesses and reinstate their right to legally operate in the region.



Donetsk People's Republic



Luhansk People's Republic

Falkland Islands

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Falkland Islands is a secular territory.



Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the Falkland Islands Constitution Order 1985 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Falkland Islands is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP either by its own ratification or via the United Kingdom; United Kingdom voted in favour of the UDHR; Falkland Islands is party to the ECHR.

Mandatory of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in the Falkland Islands.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Faroe Islands



2024 RoRB Classification: **Receptive**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: **Church of the Faroe Islands is the state denomination.**

Protections: **No protection was specifically granted in the 1953 Danish constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.**

Human rights instruments: Faroe Islands is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP by way of Denmark; Denmark voted in favour of the UDHR; Faroe Islands is party to the ECHR by way of Denmark.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in the Faroe Islands.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

French Guiana

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: French Guiana is a secular territory.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest French constitution from 2008 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: French Guiana is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP by way of France; French Guiana voted in favour of the UDHR; French Guiana is partied to the ECHR by way of France.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandate by law to register with the government to operate legally in French Guiana.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



French Polynesia

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: French Polynesia is a secular territory.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest French constitution from 2008 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: French Polynesia is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP by way of France; French Polynesia voted in favour of the UDHR; French Polynesia is partied to the ECHR by way of France.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandate by law to register with the government to operate legally in French Polynesia.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Gibraltar

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Gibraltar is a secular territory; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance.



Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of “creed” was affirmed in the Gibraltar Constitution Order 2006.

Human rights instruments: Gibraltar is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UNDRIP via the United Kingdom; Gibraltar is not party to the UNCRC; United Kingdom voted in favour of the UDHR; Gibraltar is party to the ECHR.

Mandatory of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Gibraltar.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Greenland



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Denmark is the state denomination.

Protections: No protection was specifically granted in the 1953 Danish constitution against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Greenland is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP by way of Denmark; Denmark voted in favour of the UDHR; Greenland is party to the ECHR by way of Denmark.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Greenland.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Guadeloupe

2024 RoRB Classification: **Apathetic**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: **Guadeloupe is a secular territory.**

Protections: **Explicit protection was granted in the latest French constitution from 2008 against discrimination on the basis of religion.**

Human rights instruments: **Guadeloupe is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP by way of France; Guadeloupe voted in favour of the UDHR; Guadeloupe is partied to the ECHR by way of France.**

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: **religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Guadeloupe.**

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Guam

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Guam is a secular territory.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the 1950 Organic Act of Guam against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Guam is partied to the ICCPR; Guam is not partied to the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP because the United States either rejected these documents or failed to ratify them; United States voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional**.

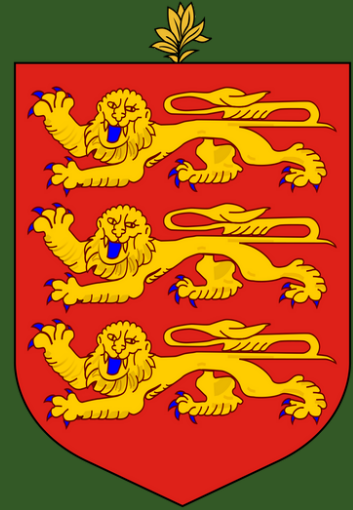
Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Guam.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Guernsey, Bailiwick of



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Church of England is the state denomination.

Human rights instruments: Guernsey is not party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the UDHR; Guernsey is also not party to the UNCRC; Guernsey did not vote on the UDHR; Guernsey is not party to the ECHR.

Mandatory of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally on Guernsey.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hierarchy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Hong Kong is a secular territory.

Protections: Implicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in Article 25 of Hong Kong Basic Law from 1990 effective from 1997.

Human rights instruments: Hong Kong is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Hong Kong did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious or belief organisations are not legally required to register with the government. They must, however, register to receive government benefits such as tax-exempt status, rent subsidies, government or other professional development training, use of government facilities, or a grant to provide social services. To qualify for such benefits, a group must prove to the satisfaction of the government that it is established solely for religious, charitable, social, or recreational reasons. Registrants must provide the name and purpose of the organization, identify its office holders, and confirm the address of the principal place of business and any other premises the organization owns or occupies. If a religious group registers with the government, it enters the registry of all NGOs, but the government makes no adjudication on the validity of any registered groups. Religious groups may register as a society, a tax-exempt organization, or both, provided they have at least three members who hold valid SAR identity documents; the registration process normally takes approximately 12 working days. The Falun Dafa Association is registered as a society rather than a religious group; as a society, it may establish offices, collect dues from members, and have legal status. Government tax regulations provide that any group, including religious groups, involved in activities deemed to endanger national security would not be recognized as a charitable organization. Religious groups may apply to the government to lease land on concessional terms through a sponsorship from the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau. Religious groups may apply to develop or use facilities in accordance with local legislation. The Chinese Temples Committee, led by the Secretary of the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau, oversees the management and logistical operations of 24 of the region's 600 temples and gives grants to other charitable organizations. The SAR Chief Executive appoints its members. The committee provides grants to the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau for disbursement in the form of financial assistance to individuals in need. A colonial-era law does not require new temples to register to be eligible for Temples Committee assistance.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, membership quota, nationality quota, qualifications for registered status are ambiguous. As of year's end, the trial of 91-year-old Cardinal Joseph Zen on charges that he violated the NSL by "colluding with foreign forces" remained pending. Zen, the former Bishop of Hong Kong and an outspoken defender of civil rights in the SAR and mainland China, remained free on bail, following his arrest in December 2022. Zen had to surrender his travel documents, including his passport, to Hong Kong authorities as a condition of his bail; however, in January, the Hong Kong government allowed Zen to travel to the Vatican to attend the funeral of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, and media reported he met privately with Pope Francis. Media outlets reported that on March 20, a court sentenced Alan Keung, founder of independent media outlet Free HK Media and known as "Pastor Keung," and two others to 10 months in prison for selling a "seditious book" that discussed the 2019 prodemocracy protests. Local media reported that in March, the Hong Kong Taoist Association canceled a scheduled parade to celebrate "Taoist Day." Organizers instead held a religious assembly open only to members in a small soccer field in Kowloon. The association said it had expected approximately 1,600 persons to take part in the parade. An organizer told media outlets the group moved the event because police did not approve organizers' request to hold the march, but police officials did not reply to media inquiries about whether they objected to the demonstration. Government officials and legislative council members attended the stadium rally. A November report from Hong Kong Watch highlighted some Hong Kong religious leaders' concerns that since the NSL went into effect, religious schools in Hong Kong, under pressure from the Hong Kong government, were "diluting religious education" due to new NSL and "patriotic" education mandates. Some Protestant Christian leaders also voiced concern about new difficulties reserving space in public schools for church activities, according to the report.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Due to the ongoing encroachment of the CCP into life in Hong Kong, it is doubtful that the Special Administrative Region will maintain its status of receptive if CCP successfully imposes anything like its own policies on religion in Hong Kong; on this basis, protection of the Basic Law of Hong Kong regarding religious freedom and religious recognition against CCP encroachment is essential as is bringing attention to the ongoing increase of restrictions on civil life in Hong Kong; to maintain its receptivity and to become Dynamic, Hong Kong would need to establish distinct procedures for recognising and registering religious entities anti would need to establish a recognition agency to manage its recognition system independent of the government.

Isle of Man

2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Church of England is the state denomination.

Human rights instruments: Isle of Man is not party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC or the UNDRIP; Isle of Man did not vote on the UDHR; Isle of Man is not party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional**.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally on the Isle of Man.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Jersey, Bailiwick of



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Church of England is the state denomination; the leader of the Anglican church on Jersey is the Dean of Jersey, a non-voting member of Jersey's parliament.

Human rights instruments: Jersey is partied to the UNCRC; Jersey is not partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, or the UNDRIP; Jersey did not vote on the UDHR; Jersey is not partied to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally on Jersey.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Macao Special Administrative Region



2024 RoRB Classification: Receptive

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Macau is a secular territory.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in Article 25 of Macao Basic Law from 1993 effective from 1999.

Human rights instruments: Macau is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP; Macau did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: stipulatory registration – religious groups are not required to register to conduct religious activities, but registration enables them to benefit from legal status. Benefits include exemption from taxation (such as property tax, stamp duty, complementary tax [profit tax], and industrial tax) and receiving financial assistance from the government. Religious groups who choose to register must do so with the Identification Bureau, providing the name of an individual applicant and that person's position in the group, identification card number, and contact information, as well as the group's name and a copy of the group's charter. Registered charities receive the same benefits as registered religious groups. Religious groups need to be registered separately as a charity under a different name in order to provide charitable services. By law, religious groups may develop and maintain relations with religious groups abroad. The law states there is no official religion in the SAR and stipulates all religious denominations are equal before the law. The law provides for freedom of religion, including privacy of religious belief, freedom of religious assembly, freedom to hold religious processions, and freedom of religious education. Under the SAR's NSL bylaws, the Judiciary Police has four national security branches that have investigative authority over religious groups and personnel, among others: the National Security Information Division; the National Security Crime Investigation Division; the National Security Action Support Division; and the National Security Affairs Integrated Service Division.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation, nationality quota, nominal restriction, secondary procedure. Some religious groups continued to report they retained their ability to conduct charitable activities on the mainland by working through official channels and officially recognized churches. The government continued to provide financial support to a variety of religious groups to establish schools, child-care centers, clinics, homes for the elderly, rehabilitation centers, and vocational training centers. The government also continued to refer victims of human trafficking to religious organizations for the provision of support services. Most religious groups in the SAR maintained close ties with the central government. During the year, multiple provincial government delegations from the mainland met with local religious leaders during visits to the SAR. The SAR government reported it had a long-standing relationship with local religious communities. According to a government report issued in January, senior officials regularly consulted with religious leaders as part of a Beijing-led strategy to foster greater regional religious and cultural exchange within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area. Under this initiative, the Buddhist federations of Guangdong Province, Hong Kong, and Macau, with support from the Macau Foundation and the SAR's Cultural Affairs Bureau, held a Buddhist Puja in Macau in December 2022 to celebrate the 23rd anniversary of the transfer of sovereignty over Macau to the PRC. Some religious activists in the diaspora called on the PRC government to allow greater religious expression in the SAR, as provided for by the Basic Law. A former lawmaker said that although in prior years Falun Gong practitioners had been tacitly allowed to set up promotion stalls at the city's landmark Ruins of St. Paul's, after 2022, police refused to approve their stalls saying the stalls obstructed pedestrian movement.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that is able to bestow both existential recognition and legal registration simultaneously and at various levels of activity; revoke the imposed nationality quota, the nominal restriction policy and the secondary procedure within the registration process; to be classified Dynamic, establish a recognition agency that is independent of government to manage the recognition system.

Martinique

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Martinique is a secular territory.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest French constitution from 2008 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Martinique is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP by way of France; Martinique voted in favour of the UDHR; Martinique is partied to the ECHR by way of France.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional**.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Martinique.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Mayotte, Department of

2024 RoRB Classification: **Apathetic**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: **Mayotte is a secular territory.**

Protections: **Explicit protection was granted in the latest French constitution from 2008 against discrimination on the basis of religion.**

Human rights instruments: **Mayotte is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP by way of France; Mayotte voted in favour of the UDHR; Mayotte is party to the ECHR by way of France.**

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: **religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Mayotte.**

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Montserrat

2024 RoRB Classification: **Apathetic**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: **Montserrat is a secular territory; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2010 and in the oath of allegiance.**

Protections: **Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in Article 16(3) of the latest constitution from 2010.**

Human rights instruments: **Montserrat is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP via the United Kingdom; United Kingdom favoured in favour of the UDHR; Montserrat is party to the ECHR.**

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally on Montserrat.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



New Caledonia

2024 RoRB Classification: **Apathetic**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: **New Caledonia is a secular territory.**

Protections: **Explicit protection was granted in the latest French constitution from 2008 against discrimination on the basis of religion.**

Human rights instruments: **New Caledonia is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP via France; France voted in favour of the UDHR; New Caledonia is partied to the ECHR.**

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: **religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in New Caledonia.**

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Niue

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: No claim was made in the latest constitution from 2019.

Secularity: Niue is a secular territory; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance and other official oaths.

Protections: No protection was granted in the latest constitution from 2019 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Niue is party to the UNCRC; Niue is not party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, or the UNDRIP; Niue did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally on Niue.

Key restriction tools imposed: insufficient data exists on restriction tools imposed in Niue at this time.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

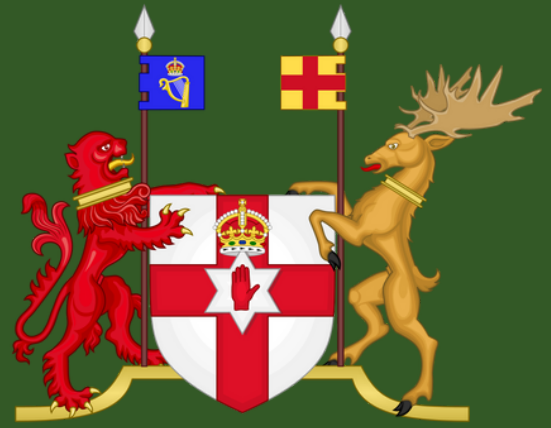


Northern Ireland

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Northern Ireland is a secular territory; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance.



Protections: Explicit protection was granted in Article 20(1)(a) of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Northern Ireland is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP via the United Kingdom; United Kingdom voted in favour of the UDHR; Northern Ireland is party to the ECHR via the United Kingdom.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: registration of religious groups is not mandated by the authorities in Northern Ireland.

Key restriction tools imposed: insufficient data exists on restriction tools imposed in Northern Ireland at this time.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Northern Mariana Islands, Commonwealth of the



2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Northern Mariana Islands is a secular territory.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in Section 6 of the Commonwealth Constitution from 1978 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Northern Mariana Islands is partied to the ICCPR; Northern Mariana Islands is not partied to the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP because the United States either rejected these documents or failed to ratify them; United States voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in the Northern Mariana Islands.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Palestine, State of

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

FoRB Claim: Partial claim is made that applies only to “divine” and “monotheistic” religions.

Secularity: Islam is the state religion and sharia is the basis of legislation; state recognition is also granted to the Armenian Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Maronite, Melkite Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Syrian Catholic, and Syrian Orthodox denominations; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2003.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in Article 8 of the latest revised constitution from 2003 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Palestine is party to the ICCPR, and the ICESCR; Palestine is not party to the UNCR; Palestine did not vote on the UDHR or the UNDRIP.

Mandatoriness of registration: non-registration and malregistration.

Registration policy: non-registration – there is no specified process for religious groups to gain official PA recognition in the West Bank.

Recognition policy: each religious group must negotiate its own bilateral relationship with the PA. The PA observes 19th-century status quo arrangements reached with Ottoman authorities that recognize the presence and rights of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Melkite Greek Catholic, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, and Armenian Catholic Churches. The PA also observes subsequent agreements that recognize the rights of the Episcopal (Anglican) Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Council of Local Evangelical Churches (a coalition of evangelical Protestant Churches present in the West Bank and Gaza). The PA recognizes the authority of these religious groups to establish ecclesiastical courts to adjudicate personal status matters such as marriage, divorce, dowry, child support, inheritance, and some property matters for members of their religious communities. The PA Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs is administratively responsible for family law issues. For Muslims, sharia determines personal status law. The Jordanian Waqf administers Islamic courts in Jerusalem for Muslim residents, with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs in Jordan having appellate authority. By law, members of one religious group may submit a personal status dispute to a different religious group for adjudication if the disputants agree it is appropriate to do so. The PA maintains some unwritten understandings with churches that are not officially recognized, based on the basic principles of the status quo agreements, including with the Assemblies of God, Church of the Nazarene, and some evangelical Christian churches, which allow these churches to operate freely. Some of these groups may perform some official functions, such as issuing marriage licenses. Churches not recognized by the PA generally must obtain special one-time permission from the PA to perform marriages or adjudicate personal status matters if these groups want the actions to be recognized by and registered with the PA. The churches may not proselytize. By law, the PA provides financial support to Islamic institutions and places of worship. A PA religious committee also provides some financial support for Christian cultural activities. Although the PA removed the religious affiliation category from Palestinian identity cards issued since 2014, older identity cards continue to circulate, listing the holder as either Muslim or Christian. Israeli government regulations recognize 16 sites in Jerusalem and its environs as holy places for Jews, while various other budgetary and governmental authorities recognize an additional 160 places as holy for Jews. Recognized churches operate private schools in the West Bank that include religious instruction.

Malregistration – the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict undermines the ability for laws to protect even religious communities with bilateral cooperation agreements with the Palestinian Authority.

Key restriction tools imposed: proselytism is prohibited from all unrecognized religious groups, vertical recognition is in effect (verticalism) due to Islam being the state religion and then some Christian churches receiving bilateral cooperation agreements (with various categories among them) and other groups remaining unrecognized. On January 30, Haaretz reported the Israeli government would not appeal a 2022 Jerusalem District Court order halting the registration of the St. Alexander Nevsky Church in Jerusalem’s Old City as being owned by the Russian government. The decision shifted responsibility for determining the ownership of the contested religious site back to the Prime Minister’s office. In 2022, the Jerusalem District Court ruled the Israeli cabinet, rather than the Israeli Justice Ministry’s Land Registrar or the court, had sole authority to approve any transfer of ownership of the church. The court was responding to a petition by the Orthodox Palestine Society of the Holy Land, which owned the property until 2020, when the Land Registrar, acting on the request of the Prime Minister’s Office, registered the ownership to the Russian government. Religious groups that were not recognized by the PA, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, faced a continued PA ban on proselytizing but stated they were able to conduct most other functions unhindered. Palestinian authorities generally recognized on a case-by-case basis personal status documents issued by unrecognized churches. The PA, however, continued to refuse to recognize personal status legal documents (e.g., marriage certificates) issued by some of these unrecognized churches, which the groups said made it difficult for them to register newborn children under their fathers’ names or as children of married couples. Many unrecognized churches advised members with dual citizenship to marry or divorce abroad and to register the action officially in that location. Some converts to unrecognized Christian faiths arranged for recognized churches with which they were previously affiliated to perform their marriages and divorces. Members of some faith communities and faith-based organizations stated they viewed their need to do so as conflicting with their religious beliefs. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, present in Jerusalem since 1887, remained officially unrecognized by Israel, although the government “acknowledged” the church. The church lacked tax-exempt status on its properties or its own ecclesiastical courts to adjudicate divorce, inheritance, or custody issues, but the state recognized marriages performed by church clergy. Church leaders reported the group requested recognition from the Israeli foreign affairs and interior ministries during the year but that, as of year’s end, the government took no action. According to members of unrecognized faith communities in the West Bank, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, established Christian groups continued to oppose their efforts to obtain official PA recognition, despite their decades-long presence in the territory.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); **hierarcy** (not free; non-Islamic materials intended for propagational use requires preapproval); **monasticism** (free); **nuptial**, **initatory** and **burial rites** (free); **pastoral services** (free); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; subject to registration); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (free); **religious buildings** (free); **religious instruction** (free); **religious literature** (free); **religious and worship services** (free); **religious trade** (free).

Recommendations

Dismantlement of the current apparatus of laws restricting reasonable religious activity; establish a recognition system for the country that has jurisdiction over both West Bank and the Gaza Strip to provide both existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems and their derivatives and at multiple levels of activity; repeal laws on proselytism, conversion and blasphemy and deconstruct the system of partial recognition that is currently in place even if this requires the disestablishment of Islam as the state religion; remove all subjective language from the law to help reduce arbitrary enforcement.



Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands



2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Pitcairn Islands is a secular territory; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance, oath of the office of governor and the judicial oath.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the Pitcairn Constitution Order 2010.

Human rights instruments: Pitcairn Islands is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP via the United Kingdom; United Kingdom favoured in favour of the UDHR; Pitcairn Islands is not partied to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in the Pitcairn Islands.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic

2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious



ForRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Transnistria is officially a secular territory; however, the Moldovan Orthodox Church receives preferential treatment; Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism are specifically mentioned in law as religions with a historical presence in the region.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted against discrimination on the basis of religion in the latest constitution from 2016.

Human rights instruments: Transnistria is party to the UNCRC; Transnistria is not party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, or the UNDRIP; Transnistria did not vote on the UDHR; Transnistria is not party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – religious or belief organisations are mandated by law to register with the authorities in Transnistria to operate legally in the territory. To register as a religious organization in Transnistria, a religious group must present: proof of activity in the region for at least 10 years; a list of at least 10 members who are 18 or older who have Transnistrian “citizenship” and permanent residence in one of the seven administrative-territorial units in the region; a list of founders and governing members and their personal details; the charter, statutes, and minutes of its constituent assembly; the organization’s basic religious doctrine; contact details of its governing body; the origin of financial resources for the organization’s activity and other assets; and a receipt indicating payment of the registration fee. Local religious groups may also register as part of a centralized religious organization, which must consist of at least three local religious groups that have previously registered separately as legal entities. In that case, their application must additionally include a copy of the registration papers of the centralized organization. Centralized religious organizations must inform the registration “authority” on a yearly basis about intentions to extend their activities to cover additional local groups. Transnistrian “authorities” must decide to register a religious group within 30 days of the application. If those “authorities” decide to conduct a “religious assessment” – a law enforcement investigation of the group’s background and activities – registration may be postponed for up to six months or denied if investigating “authorities” determine the group poses a threat to the security or morality of the region or if foreign religious groups, are involved in its activities. Under the “law,” foreign religious groups may not register or undertake religious activities. Foreign citizens have the freedom to worship, including with registered religious groups, but they may not be founders or members of religious groups. Religious groups disband on their own decision or upon a Transnistrian “court” decision. The “prosecutor’s office” or de facto executive, city, or district authorities may request the “courts” to disband or suspend a religious group on multiple grounds. Such grounds include the following: disturbing public order or violating public security; conducting activities deemed to be extremist; coercing persons into breaking up their families; infringing on citizens’ identity, rights, and freedoms; violating citizens’ morality and well-being; using psychotropic substances, drugs, hypnosis, or perverse activities during religious activities; encouraging suicide or the refusal of medical treatment for religious reasons; obstructing compulsory education; using coercion for alienation of property to the benefit of the religious community; and encouraging refusal to fulfill civic duties. Transnistrian “law” allows the use of private homes and apartments to hold religious services. It does not, however, allow religious groups to use homes and apartments as their officially registered addresses. The “law” also allows such groups to hold religious services and rituals in public places, such as hospitals, clinics, orphanages, geriatric homes, and prisons. Transnistrian “authorities” screen and may ban the import or export of religious printed materials, audio and video recordings, and other religious items.

Recognition policy: in separatist Transnistria, Transnistrian “law” affirms the special role of the Orthodox Church in the region’s culture and spirituality. The “law” recognizes respect for Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and other religious groups historically present in the region. All religious groups, whether registered or not, officially have freedom to worship, but the “law” permits restrictions on the right to freedom of conscience and religion “if necessary to protect the constitutional order, morality, health, citizens’ rights and interests, or state defense and security.” Transnistrian “law” criminalized complaints by residents of the region to foreign judicial bodies such as the European Court for Human Rights.

Key restriction tools imposed: denial of registration based on religion or belief, Jehovah’s Witnesses have faced registration hurdles in the past, limitations on GFO and the religious activities of foreigners, non-recognition for any religion or denomination other than the MOC. Jehovah’s Witnesses reported improvements with respect to conscientious objection to “military” service in Transnistria. They said, as of April 26, Transnistrian “authorities” amended the “law” on alternate civilian service to allow the group’s members to undertake alternative civilian service within any “state” institution. Previously, members were only allowed to perform alternative service within the Transnistrian “Ministry of Defense,” which Jehovah’s Witnesses stated was also contrary to their beliefs. Jehovah’s Witnesses reported a continued worsening of their situation in the Transnistria Region. In November 2022, the Transnistrian “Ministry of Justice” banned eight Jehovah’s Witnesses publications and one website (jw.org) registered in the United States, as extremist. The “prosecutor” sued the website owners in court without informing the Jehovah’s Witnesses or allowing them to present a defense. The website owner and Jehovah’s Witnesses leadership said they tried to file an appeal but “authorities” did not allow them to submit challenges to the “court” decision. Transnistrian “authorities” failed to reregister two local Jehovah’s Witnesses groups in Tiraspol and Ribnita. The Tiraspol community applied to reregister in 2019, “authorities” consideration of their application was still pending. In August, the Tiraspol “court” ruled against the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ right to register in Ribnita. The Jehovah’s Witnesses filed an appeal, which was rejected at a hearing in October. The Ribnita community applied to register six times since the new registration “law” went into effect. During the year, Transnistrian “authorities” contracted a history lecturer from the “Taras Shevchenko” University of Tiraspol to review the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ publications and beliefs prior to approval of registration. The lecturer determined the group’s beliefs and publications violated the “constitution,” advocated overthrow of the “government” and constituted extremism. According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, the community was unable to freely practice its faith or to import or distribute its literature during the year. In their annual report, Jehovah’s Witnesses stated, “The de facto authorities refuse to grant legal status to congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses. This effectively criminalizes the Witnesses’ peaceful religious activity and leaves them vulnerable to discrimination.” Jehovah’s Witnesses stated that “authorities” attempted to increasingly marginalize the community. They feared the “authorities” plan to liquidate the group and criminally prosecute the 2,400 members in the region. Transnistrian “law” prohibits proselytizing in private homes and limits distribution of religious literature to houses of worship and special premises that the authorities designate. It also bans the involvement of children under 18 in religious organizations or requiring children to enroll in religious classes against their will or without prior consent from their parents or legal guardians. It requires the religious groups to reregister to operate legally in the region and stipulates groups that failed to reregister by the end of 2010 are “subject to liquidation.” The region’s registration “authority” registers religious groups and monitors their adherence to the goals and activities set forth in their statutes. Registration allows religious groups, including the ability to own and build places of worship, open religious schools, conduct religious services in penitentiary institutions, and publish literature. The “law” requires religious organizations that were active in the Transnistria region before November 14, 2016, to register again with de facto authorities by the end of 2021. Another provision specifies which entities are responsible for different aspects of monitoring religious organizations: the region’s “prosecution office” monitors the observance of the “law” on freedom of worship and religious organizations, the “registering authority” makes sure religious groups observe their statutes, while local “authorities” monitor observance of notification requirements about the initiation or continuation of a religious group’s activities. The “law” allows missionary and preaching activities through media outlets, including the internet, or other legal means. Religious organizations or their representatives may practice such activities in religious buildings, places of pilgrimage, cemeteries, educational institutions historically used for religious teaching, and in other public places in line with the “law on public assembly.” Religious organizations may hold services with their members in private homes, but proselytizing is banned in private homes. Foreign or stateless citizens legally residing in Transnistria may engage in such activities only if the religious organization involved is registered in the relevant territorial unit. The “law” bans missionary and preaching activities that violate public order or security, promote extremism, harm the traditional family, or harm citizens’ health or morality.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarcy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; subject to registration); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; subject to registration); **pastoral services** (not free; subject to registration); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; illegal); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; subject to registration); **religious buildings** (not free; subject to registration); **religious instruction** (not free; subject to registration); **religious literature** (not free; subject to registration); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to registration); **religious trade** (not free; subject to registration).

Recommendations

Revoke the mandatory registration order and the discriminatory denial of registration; revoke discrimination between GFOs and domestic groups as well as the policy of non-recognition for all denominations except the MOC.

Puerto Rico, Commonwealth of

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Puerto Rico is a secular territory; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 1952.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted against discrimination on the basis of “religious ideas” in the latest constitution from 1952.

Human rights instruments: Puerto Rico is partied to the ICCPR; Puerto Rico is a signatory of the ICESCR (via the United States) but this has not been ratified; Puerto Rico is neither partied to the UNCRC nor the UNDRIP; Puerto Rico did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: registration of religious groups is not mandated by the authorities in Puerto Rico.

Key restriction tools imposed: amalgamation.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Réunion, Department of La

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Réunion is a secular territory.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted in the latest French constitution from 2008 against discrimination on the basis of religion.

Human rights instruments: Réunion is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP by way of France; Réunion voted in favour of the UDHR; Réunion is partied to the ECHR by way of France.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Réunion.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Saint Barthélemy

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Saint Barthélemy is a secular territory.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted against discrimination on the basis of religion in the latest French constitution.

Human rights instruments: Saint Barthélemy is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP via France; France voted in favour of the UDHR; Saint Barthélemy is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Saint Barthélemy.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha is a secular territory; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance, oath of Member of the Legislative Council, oath of confidentiality and the judicial oath.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in the St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha Constitution Order 2009.

Human rights instruments: Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP via the United Kingdom; United Kingdom favoured in favour of the UDHR; Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha is partied to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Saint Helena



Tristan da Cunha



Ascension Island

Saint Martin, Collectivity of

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Saint Martin is a secular territory.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted against discrimination on the basis of religion in the latest French constitution.

Human rights instruments: Saint Martin is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP via France; France voted in favour of the UDHR; Saint Martin is partied to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Saint Martin.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, Territorial Collectivity of



2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Saint-Pierre and Miquelon is a secular territory.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted against discrimination on the basis of religion in the latest French constitution.

Human rights instruments: Saint-Pierre and Miquelon is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP via France; France voted in favour of the UDHR; Saint-Pierre and Miquelon is partied to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Saint-Pierre and Miquelon.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Scotland

2024 RoRB Classification: **Receptive**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Scotland is officially a secular territory; however, the Church of Scotland, a Presbyterian denomination, maintains its status as the national church.



Protections: Explicit protection was granted against discrimination on the basis of religion in the Equality Act 2010.

Human rights instruments: Scotland is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP via the United Kingdom; United Kingdom voted in favour of the UDHR; Scotland is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by Scottish law to register with the government to operate legally.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish distinct provisions for legal registration and existential recognition of religious entities.

Sint Maarten

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Sint Maarten is a secular territory; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2010.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted against discrimination on the basis of religion in the latest constitution from 2010.

Human rights instruments: Sint Maarten is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP via the Netherlands; the Netherlands voted in favour of the UDHR; Sint Maarten is party to the ECHR via the Netherlands.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Sint Maarten.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Somaliland, Republic of

2024 RoRB Classification: **Terminal**



FoRB Claim: Partial claim is made that excludes the right to propagate any religion other than Islam.

Secularity: Islam is the state religion and sharia is the basis of legislation; theism was affirmed in the latest constitution from 2001; the same constitution mandated that the President and candidates for Vice President and the house of representatives must be Muslim.

Protections: No protection was granted against discrimination on the basis of religion in the latest constitution from 2001.

Human rights instruments: Somaliland is not party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, nor the UNDRIP; Somaliland did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: non-registration.

Registration policy: non-registration – Somaliland has no mechanism to register religious organizations and no specific requirements to do so. In Somaliland, religious schools and formal places of worship must obtain permission to operate from the Somaliland Ministry of Religion. Somaliland law does not, however, elucidate or enforce consequences for operating without permission.

Key restriction tools imposed: criminalisation of conversion from Islam, Islamic places of worship must obtain government permission to operate, non-Islamic proselytism is prohibited by the Constitution, and the prohibition of the importation of non-Islamic religious materials. According to several advocacy groups working in the region, in early October, the Somaliland Supreme Court heard the second appeal in the case of a Somaliland resident sentenced in 2022 to five years in prison after being convicted of blasphemy, apostasy, insulting Islam and the Prophet of Islam on social media, and spreading Christianity. The Supreme Court ruled the accused should remain in prison for at least two more months, with no guarantee that she would be released at that time. According to her lawyer, the appellate regional court of Marodi Jeh denied her first appeal in December 2022. After the individual declared a return to Islam, the court conditionally released her in August, subject to reimprisonment should she be found practicing Christianity or communicating with Christians. There was no further information available about her case before the end of the year. Christians and members of other non-Muslim religious groups continued to report an inability to practice their religion openly due to fear of societal harassment across most of the country. The only Catholic church in Somaliland remained closed, and observers stated its reopening would be controversial.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; illegal to convert from Islam); **hierarcy** (not free; illegal); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; illegal for all non-Muslim groups); **public expression and observance** (not free; non-Islamic expression and observance illegal); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; subject to government preapproval); **religious trade** (not free; illegal).

Recommendations

Abolish the criminalisation of conversion from Islam and other fundamental exercises of freedom of religion or belief such as the repressive laws on non-Islamic proselytism; establish provisions for the existential recognition of religions other than Islam; establish provisions for the legal registration of belief-based organisations other than those of Islamic affiliation.

South Ossetia – the State of Alania, Republic of



2024 RoRB Classification: Censorious

ForB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: South Ossetia is officially a secular territory; however, the South Ossetian Orthodox Church, which declared independence from the Georgian Orthodox Church in 1992, receives preferential treatment by the authorities; the constitution states that “Orthodox Christianity and traditional South Ossetian beliefs represent one of the foundations of the national self-awareness of the Ossetian people.”

Human rights instruments: South Ossetia is party to the UNCRC; South Ossetia is not party to the ICCPR or the ICESCR; South Ossetia did not vote on the UDHR or the UNDRIP; South Ossetia is not party to the ECHR.

Mandatory registration: mandatory.

Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – religious or belief organisations are mandated by authorities to register to operate legally in the territory of South Ossetia as influenced by Russian registration law.

Key restriction tools imposed: prohibition of Jehovah's Witnesses since 2017, Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) officials stated de facto authorities in South Ossetia pressured Orthodox churches to merge with the Russian Orthodox Church, de facto authorities in South Ossetia declared GOC religious services illegal but permitted them in practice. De facto authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia continued to restrict movement across the administrative boundary line with the rest of Georgia and to detain and fine residents for “illegal border crossings,” according to multiple reports by international and domestic observers. De facto authorities in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia continued to ban Jehovah's Witnesses. According to GOC representatives, de facto authorities allowed the GOC to conduct services in South Ossetia, despite a legal ban.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarcy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Revoke the prohibition of Jehovah's Witnesses and any other form of religious prohibition; ensure that the Russian Federation's exportation of worst practice does not continue to take place in the territory to the detriment of RoRB and ForB conditions.

Tibet Autonomous Region

2024 RoRB Classification: Terminal

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made

Secularity: Tibet is a hypersecular territory controlled by the People's Republic of China which professes state atheism; the CCP recognises Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism and Taoism under its framework of patriotic religious associations.

Mandatoriness of registration: mandatory.



Registration policy: broad mandatory registration – the government recognizes five official religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” representing these religions are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services or other religious ceremonies and activities. CCP regulations regarding religion are issued by the CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFWD). The UFWD’s Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Work manages religious affairs through the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA). The UFWD controls the selection of Tibetan religious leaders, including lamas. Regulations stipulate that, depending on the perceived geographic area of influence of the lama, relevant administrative entities may deny permission for a lama to be recognized as reincarnated (a tenet of Tibetan Buddhism), and that these administrative entities must approve reincarnations. The UFWD claims the right to deny recognition of reincarnations of high lamas of “especially great influence.” The regulations also state no foreign organization or individual may interfere in the selection of reincarnate lamas, and all reincarnate lamas must be reborn within China. The CCP maintains a registry of officially recognized reincarnate lamas. UFWD regulations allow citizens to take part only in officially approved religious practices; these regulations assert CCP control over all aspects of religious activity, including the managing of religious venues, groups, personnel, and schools. Through local regulations issued under the framework of the national-level Management Regulation of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries, governments of the TAR and other autonomous Tibetan areas control the registration of monasteries, nunneries, and other Tibetan Buddhist religious centers. The regulations also give the CCP formal control over building and managing religious structures and require monasteries to obtain official permission to hold large-scale religious events or gatherings. The PRC government’s Regulations on Religious Affairs require all religious groups to register with the government, impose fines on landlords who provide facilities for unauthorized religious activities, and restrict contact with overseas religious institutions. The regulations require members of religious groups to seek approval to travel abroad and prohibit “accepting domination by external forces,” which authorities say include Tibetans living outside the country, particularly the Dalai Lama. The regulations submit religious schools to the same oversight as places of worship and impose restrictions on religious groups conducting business or investments, including placing limits on the amount of donations they may receive, thereby constraining property ownership and development. Publication and distribution of literature containing religious content must follow guidelines determined by the State Publishing Administration. Publication of religious material must also conform to guidelines determined by the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee.

Key restriction tools imposed: fines on landlords who provide facilities for unapproved religious activities, preapproval by the state of the online activities of a religious group, pseudo-recognition of five religions, restriction of contact with foreign affiliates or the foreign headquarters of a religious institution, the CCP controls the selection of Tibetan Buddhist lamas. In October 2023, Tsewang Gyalpo Arya, representative of the Liaison Office of the Dalai Lama for Japan and East Asia, wrote an op-ed for the religious liberty and human rights magazine Bitter Winter discussing the impact on Tibet of the new regulations on religious activity venues that took effect on September 1. Arya stated the regulations contradicted the constitution’s guarantees of freedom to practice religion and said, “Where is religious freedom if the religious bodies are forced to assimilate and adopt the ideology of an individual or a system that does not believe in religion at all?” He said the new rules on establishing and registering monasteries and temples, which included 16 articles and 20 subclauses, made creating such venues “a very fastidious and confusing task.” The prohibition against naming religious venues after sects or persons would prevent the traditional Buddhist practice of naming monasteries or temples after a school of Buddhist thought or a religious leader. The prohibition on building large open-air religious statues outside of temples retroactively justified the CCP’s destruction of several large Buddhist statues in Tibet in recent years. Arya said the requirement that religious venues use traditional Han architecture and decoration “demonstrates the CCP’s leadership’s policy to force Chinese culture upon minorities with total disregard for the latter’s religious beliefs and culture.” Provisions on religious education encouraged “forced indoctrination inculcating the CCP’s ideology and propaganda.” RFA reported authorities sometimes interfered with registered gatherings. In July, the government canceled a Kalachakra (Wheel of Time) teaching session in Qinghai and Gansu Provinces at the last minute, despite organizers previously receiving approval. Tibet Watch reported police at the Qinghai gathering, which was already underway when they disrupted it, destroyed the monk’s ritual sand mandala in front of worshippers. In September, authorities attempted to limit participation in a Kalachakra gathering in Gansu led by the seventh Gungthang Rinpoche, Lobsang Jamyang Gelek Tenpai Khenchen, by interrogating would-be participants and restricting entry to residents living near the event site. While thousands ultimately participated, the Tibet Times reported police arrested Tsebo, a Tibetan former police official and member of the CCP, for attempting to attend. Sources reported PRC authorities engaged in transnational repression against the approximately 150,000 Tibetans living abroad, many as refugees in India and Nepal. They frequently subjected the Tibetan overseas community to harassment, monitoring, and cyberattacks. In a March statement, Tenzin Dorjee of the Tibet Action Institute said government authorities continued to pressure and threaten China-resident families of Tibetans living in other countries to dissuade their relatives from criticizing PRC policies towards Tibetans. Sources reported that the PRC continued to pressure Nepal to implement a border systems management agreement and a mutual legal assistance treaty that could result in the refoulement of Tibetan refugees to China, and to decline to register or issue identity documents to Tibetan refugees. Nepal did not take additional steps to implement the agreements, but also continued not to register Tibetans. Nepal last registered and issued documentation to Tibetan refugees in 1995.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarcy** (not free; restricted); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **proselytism** (not free; restricted); **public expression and observance** (free); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; restricted).

Recommendations

Complete dismantlement of the present terminally restrictive apparatus of laws and policies for religion and belief; however, realistically, such a dismantlement could only take place if a similar reversal in attitudes, policy and legislation was made for China as a whole.

Tokelau Islands

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Tokelau Islands is a secular territory; theism was affirmed in the latest revised constitution from 2007.



Protections: Implicit protection was granted against discrimination on the basis of religion in the latest constitution from 2007.

Human rights instruments: Tokelau is not partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, or the UNDRIP; Tokelau did not vote on the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Tokelau.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus



2024 RoRB Classification: **Censorious**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Northern Cyprus is officially a secular territory; however, Sunni Islam receives preferential treatment.

Protections: **Implicit protection was granted against discrimination on the basis of religion in the latest constitution from 1985.**

Human rights instruments: Northern Cyprus is party to the UNCRC; Northern Cyprus is not party to the ICCPR or the ICESCR; Northern Cyprus did not vote on the UDHR nor on the UNDRIP; Northern Cyprus is not party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **mandatory.**

Registration policy: pseudo-mandatory registration – although the law does not formally mandate that religious or belief organisations must register with the government, non-registered religious organisations are limited in the activities they may legally conduct, including fundamental religious functions.

Key restriction tools imposed: Government intervention in the internal affairs of religious organisations; state privilege.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Recommendations

Establish a recognition system that is able to provide procedures for existential recognition and legal registration, procedures which should remain distinct from each other; remove restrictions that are currently imposed on minority religious groups.

Turks and Caicos Islands

2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Turks and Caicos Islands is a secular territory; theism is affirmed in the oath of allegiance, oath of the office of governor and the judicial oath.

Protections: Explicit protection against discrimination on the basis of religion was affirmed in Article 16(3) of the Turks and Caicos Islands Constitution Order 2011.

Human rights instruments: Turks and Caicos Islands is party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP via the United Kingdom; United Kingdom favoured in favour of the UDHR; Turks and Caicos Islands is party to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional**.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Wales

2024 RoRB Classification: **Receptive**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Wales is a secular territory (the Church in Wales, an Anglican church, was disestablished in 1920 under the Welsh Church Act of 1914).

Protections: **Explicit protection was granted against discrimination on the basis of religion in the Equality Act 2010.**

Human rights instruments: Wales is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP via the United Kingdom; United Kingdom voted in favour of the UDHR; Wales is partied to the ECHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: **optional.**

Registration policy: registration of religious groups is not mandated by the authorities in Wales.

Key restriction tools imposed: insufficient data exists on restriction tools imposed in Wales at this time.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (not free; subject to the registration of a place of worship); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).



Wallis and Futuna Islands, Territory of the



2024 RoRB Classification: Apathetic

FoRB Claim: Explicit claim is made.

Secularity: Wallis and Futuna is a secular territory.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted against discrimination on the basis of religion in the latest French constitution.

Human rights instruments: Wallis and Futuna is partied to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC, and the UNDRIP via France; France voted in favour of the UDHR.

Mandatoriness of registration: optional.

Registration policy: religious or belief organisations are not mandated by law to register with the government to operate legally in Wallis and Futuna.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (free); hieroncy (free); monasticism (free); nuptial, initiatory and burial rites (free); pastoral services (free); private expression and observance (free); proselytism (free); public expression and observance (free); receiving donations (free); religious buildings (free); religious instruction (free); religious literature (free); religious and worship services (free); religious trade (free).

Western Sahara (Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic)



2024 RoRB Classification: **Terminal**

FoRB Claim: No claim is made.

Secularity: Islam is the state religion and the basis of legislation according to Article 2 of the latest revised constitution from 2015; theism is affirmed in the presidential oath and in the oath of office.

Protections: Explicit protection was granted against discrimination on the basis of religion in Article 25 the latest constitution from 2015.

Human rights instruments: Western Sahara is not party to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the UNCRC; Western Sahara did not vote on either the UDHR or the UNDRIP.

Mandatoriness of registration: **malregistration.**

Registration policy: non-registration – there are no official procedure for legal registration of religious or belief organisations in Western Sahara.

Malregistration – any registration procedures conducted by the Sahrawi government would not have jurisdiction across the entire Western Sahara.

Key restriction tools imposed: criminalisation of the criticism of Islam, non-recognition for any religion or denomination other than Islam, prohibition on non-Islamic proselytism and the importation of non-Islamic religious materials with the intention to propagate.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; illegal); **hieroncy** (not free; non-Islamic materials illegal); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (free); **proselytism** (not free; illegal for all non-Muslims); **public expression and observance** (not free; non-Islamic expression and observance illegal); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; illegal for non-Muslims); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; illegal).

Recommendations

Revoke the censorial Moroccan laws that have been imposed such as bans on proselytism, public expression of belief and conversion from Islam; establish a system that extends opportunities for both existential recognition and legal registration to all belief systems; remove all instances of the politicisation of religion and belief and of the registration procedures.

Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region



2023 RoRB Classification: **Terminal**

FoRB Claim: **Explicit claim is made.**

Secularity: Xinjiang is a hypersecular territory controlled by the People's Republic of China that professes state atheism; the CCP recognises Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism and Taoism under its framework of patriotic religious associations.

Mandatoriness of registration: non-registration.

Registration policy: non-registration – there are no separate registration procedures for religious groups in Xinjiang. Only religious groups belonging to one of five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” (the Buddhist Association of China, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association) representing these religions are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services or other religious ceremonies and activities. The Regulations on Religious Affairs require that religious activity “must not harm national security.” While the regulations stipulate religious groups must abide by the law, safeguard national unity, and respond to “religious extremism,” the term “extremism” is undefined. Measures to safeguard unity and respond to “religious extremism” include monitoring groups, individuals, and institutions, and recommending penalties such as suspending groups and canceling clergy credentials. To apply to become an Islamic cleric, applicants first need to submit an “Application Form for the Qualification of Islamic Clerics.” In addition, they must provide a certificate of education from an Islamic school, an education certificate from junior high school or above, and a physical examination certificate issued by a designated hospital (including items such as “mental history”). Applicants are also required to submit a household registration certificate and national identification card. The applicant must receive a letter of recommendation written by the Administration of Islamic Activity Sites where the applicant’s household registration is located and submit it to the Islamic Association of the province, autonomous region, or municipality after review and approval by the local Islamic Association. Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported authorities continued to ban civil servants, students, and teachers from fasting during Ramadan. In April, RFA reported authorities sent notices to neighbourhood committees in Urumqi and multiple prefectures that only 10–50 Muslims in certain areas would be allowed to fast during Ramadan and individuals observing the fast must register with the government. A local police officer in Kashgar Prefecture’s Tokkuzak (Toukezhake) township told RFA the purpose of the registrations was to “allay the fears of [Muslims] who are afraid to fast, in addition to security, because there should not be any misconception about the CCP’s religious policy. The Party never said to abolish religion, but to Sinicise it.”

Key restriction tools imposed: restrictions on religious attire, state preapproval of all religious activities (such as proselytising, religious instruction, publishing and distributing religious literature) is mandatory.

Basic religious activities

Conversion (not free; restricted); **hierarcy** (not free; highly restricted; preapproval required); **monasticism** (not free; restricted); **nuptial, initiatory and burial rites** (not free; restricted); **pastoral services** (not free; restricted); **private expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **proselytism** (not free; preapproval required); **public expression and observance** (not free; restricted); **receiving donations** (not free; restricted); **religious buildings** (not free; restricted); **religious instruction** (not free; restricted); **religious literature** (not free; restricted); **religious and worship services** (not free; restricted); **religious trade** (not free; illegal).

Recommendations

Not without changes first made in the Chinese heartland will a reversal in these restrictive laws imposed in Xinjiang be practical but the consequences of what the CCP has done in interning innocent citizens into “re-education facilities” and in turning the Uighur society into a police state will likely be irreversible.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Amalgamation: the lack of distinction between registration and recognition, usually in favour of one, in some national recognition systems, causing either a lack of symbolic recognition for religions and denominations or a lack of provisions for the legal registration of belief-based organisations (BBOs).

Basic religious activities: activities performed with religious purpose or based on philosophical belief that are considered central to the practice of religion or belief that their subjection to registration by the state before they can be performed is regarded impermissible; the category of 'basic religious activities' currently includes conversion, importation of religious materials (called hieroncy), monasticism, nuptial, initiatory and burial rites, pastoral services, private expression and observance, proselytism, public expression and observance, receiving donations, renting property for religious services, religious instruction, religious literature, religious and worship services, and religious trade.

Malregistration: the situation in which a government does not have the ability to enforce its registration laws throughout the territory it claims, typically due to an ongoing conflict or civil war; malregistration is problematic because it allows for non-state actors to impose their own registration law and undermines the authenticity of a religious group's receipt of registered status.

Mandatoriness: the degree to which state registration is mandatory for religious groups ranging from stipulatory (non-mandatory) to pseudo-mandatory to broad mandatory; conditional and discriminatory forms of registration also exist which are mostly categorised as mandatory.

Non-registration: a government has established no procedures for the legal registration of religious groups, especially as a means of constraining religious activity to state-approved forms.

Pseudo-mandatory: denoting the instance in which a government claims that a religious group's registration with it is not mandatory but in fact stipulates that one or more benefits of registration is a 'basic religious activity' that, according to RoRB standards, should not be subject to registration; therefore, the registration in question is pseudo-mandatory.

Registrable religious activities: activities performed with religious purpose or related to the administration of a religious group whose subjection to state registration is considered permissible due to such activities being less intrinsic to religious practice; the category of 'registrable religious activities' currently includes constructing and owning a religious building, tax-exemption, receiving non-monetary donations, the ability to receive state funding, the ability to sign contracts, the ability to open bank accounts, the ability to perform a legal nuptial, funerary and baptismal ceremonies (without a civil representative), and international missionary activity.

State privilege: a specific denomination or whole religion is not established as the state religion but nonetheless receive preferential treatment by the state, especially in the form of exclusive benefits granted that no other denomination receives.

Stipulatory registration: the instance in which a government only states that registration with it is necessary for a religious group to conduct 'registrable religious activities', activities regarded permissible to subject to registration.

ABRIDGED ARTICLE BY DR MONICA GYIMAH

Article title: Recognition and Registration Issues and Their Impacts on the Religious Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Abstract: Although the international legal framework protects the rights of all persons to adopt or manifest any religion or belief of choice without discrimination, indigenous spirituality is generally dismissed, marginalised or denied respect and recognition in many states. The dismissal and denial of recognition of indigenous spirituality has led to severe discrimination against many indigenous communities and human rights violations, including the dispossession and loss of sacred sites, the obstruction of spiritual practices and the violation of the right to religious freedom. This article examines state policies and practices on the recognition and registration of indigenous religious groups and the implications for their exercise of religious freedom. It argues that while states' recognition of indigenous spirituality has grown in recent decades, indigenous beliefs remain among the most marginalised, disrespected, discriminated and unrecognised. Consequently, many indigenous groups cannot fully exercise their religious freedom.

Introduction

While state recognition or registration of religious organisations is not legally required for the exercise of freedom of religion or belief, a lack of it can significantly impact people's ability to exercise that right and other fundamental freedoms. Registered and/or recognised religious communities receive several privileges and benefits, including access to state funds, national inclusion, protection of sacred sites and tax exemptions and deductions, that are not often available to unregistered or unrecognised groups.

Freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in many international human rights instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and applies to the followers of all religions, including indigenous spirituality. Despite this, the religious beliefs and practices of indigenous peoples are often disrespected and not given adequate recognition compared to other religions by authorities in many states, including by courts. In Western democracies such as Canada and the United States, indigenous peoples' exercise of their spirituality has been subjected to historical and ongoing political, cultural and racial discriminatory policies and practices, leading to the limitation, dismissal and denial of their rights. According to the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ahmed Shaheed, the spirituality of indigenous peoples is denied recognition and restricted in eighteen states and territories where arbitrary administrative requirements are imposed.

The dismissal or absence of recognition for indigenous peoples' spirituality and practices has facilitated indifference, marginalisation, discrimination and human rights violations, including the destruction of sacred sites belonging to indigenous communities. In many states, government policies, practices and laws have caused the dispossession and loss of many indigenous lands, including sacred sites, knowledge, language and other practices that are essential to indigenous religious traditions.

This article explores the implications of religious registration and recognition practices on indigenous peoples' right to practice their beliefs or spirituality. It focuses on government laws, policies and actions and other practices, and how they favour or disfavour indigenous spirituality and the impacts on indigenous peoples' rights. The article argues that while states' recognition of indigenous spirituality has grown in recent decades, it remains amongst the most marginalised, discriminated against, least respected and unrecognised religion or belief tradition in many states.

Besides being misunderstood, indigenous religious traditions have been impacted by religious chauvinism, prejudice and racially motivated policies that privilege Christianity, Islam and other imperialistic traditions and their cultures. The article concludes that states' discriminatory policies and laws denying recognition limit the religious freedom of indigenous peoples. This includes the dispossession and damage of traditional lands and sacred sites and the loss of the right to self-determination.

The article largely draws on a wide range of publicly available sources of information, including the U.S. Department of State's annual International Religious Freedom Report, reports by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, court rulings and academic literature. Finally, the article draws some concluding remarks and makes recommendations on how to enhance the visibility and recognition of indigenous religious practices to ensure the protection of indigenous peoples' freedom to exercise their right to practice, manifest, teach and maintain their spirituality and beliefs or mitigate violations of that right.

International legal framework

Freedom of religion and belief (FoRB) is protected in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Articles 18 and 27 of the ICCPR, and several other international human rights instruments and national constitutions. This right is further elaborated on in the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief of 1981. The right includes the freedom of all persons, including indigenous peoples, to have or adopt their religion or belief of choice, whether theistic, non-theistic or atheistic, and extend to individuals or groups even if they do not adhere to 'institutionalised' belief systems. Freedom of religion also guarantees the right of every person to freely manifest their religion or belief in the form of worship, observance, practice, teaching and dissemination without interference or the fear of punishment.

Articles 18 and 27 grant indigenous peoples the right to define and determine their spirituality and identity. In his interim report of 2022, Shaheed articulated that indigenous peoples' FoRB is also connected with their right to self-determination. This means that indigenous peoples are guaranteed the freedom to define and determine their own spiritual identity. Although there is no universally accepted definition of "indigenous peoples" under international law, one of the most fundamental and generally accepted criteria is "community self-identification." Many indigenous people consider themselves 'distinct' from others by their shared identity, culture, language and their possession of a "historical continuity with pre-colonial societies on their land."

The term 'spirituality' instead of 'religion' is used by many indigenous communities to describe their religious beliefs and practices. This is because there is no equivalent word in English for the term 'religion' to describe indigenous spirituality, which is considered to be much broader. The term 'spirituality' is also preferred because spirituality is central to indigenous peoples' identity in ways that are distinctive from other religions, including Christianity and Islam. Unlike in most European cultures, many indigenous cultures do not conceptually draw a clear distinction between what is "sacred and secular", or culture, language and identity, or between "spirituality and the land on or through which it is expressed." Thus, the term 'spirituality' represents the holistic nature of indigenous beliefs in how they transcend spiritual ceremonies and encompasses a wide range of activities, including hunting, fishing, herding and gathering plants, medicines and goods "[with] a spiritual dimension." Many indigenous communities view their spirituality as a 'way of life', and transcendental worship intrinsically linked to local culture and worldview that forms an integral part of their emotions, habits, daily experiences and practices or virtues, ways of thinking, health and a particular way of living together and communicating.

To indigenous peoples, land is not merely material and nature is not just natural. Rather, both have spiritual dimensions and are part of a sacred substance that is "the source, sustenance and end of all cosmic life on which everything depends." Indigenous spirituality is thus interrelated to the land, and all that is within it, including plants, the animal world, supernatural beings, forces and rituals, as they "are all interrelated." Researchers have reported for example that "religion" for the Inuit people in Alaska is connected to "their traditional ways of relating to their land and the life that is present in seas and other waterways." An Inuit way of life includes the transmission of their traditions and customs across generations to ensure their communal well-being and survival.

Recent growth in international human rights standards and mechanisms has led to a significant expansion in the conception of indigenous peoples' right to FoRB. For example, the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP; hereafter "the Declaration") is an internationally-recognised framework that sets the minimum standards for the protection of the human rights of indigenous peoples. The Declaration was developed in consultation with indigenous peoples to articulate their rights, including their spiritual practices. It provides an important clarification on the standards of the specific rights of indigenous people provided in Article 18 of the UDHR and Articles 18 and 27 of the legally binding instrument ICCPR and how they are applied to indigenous peoples. Several provisions directly relate to rights associated with practising indigenous spirituality, including but not limited to Articles 8, 10, 11, 12 (2), 13 and 18. For instance, Article 12 (1) states the following:

Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.

Article 25 of the Declaration extends beyond the conventional concept of religious rights of individuals to manifest and practise their religion or belief outlined in Article 18 of the ICCPR. Article 12 of the Declaration guarantees indigenous peoples' access to and maintenance of religious and cultural sites, ceremonial objects and repatriation while Article 25 provides for recognition of their spiritual connection with traditional lands.

Many international actors, including states, regional and domestic courts, scholars and rights-holders rely on the Declaration to interpret ICCPR provisions concerning the rights of indigenous peoples. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has observed that the protections of minority rights provided under Article 27 of the ICCPR include indigenous peoples' relationship with "the use of land resources...[such as] traditional activities as fishing or hunting." Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) also protects the right of everyone to participate in cultural life, which has been interpreted to include 'religion or belief systems.' The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also affirms that 'culture' in Article 15 requires states to respect the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their spiritual relationship with their ancestral lands and other natural resources.

State policies and practices

Despite the religious protections provided for all persons in Article 18 of the ICCPR and the expansion in the concept of indigenous peoples' right to FoRB in recent decades, indigenous beliefs or spirituality is not respected or recognised in many states. In this context, recognition and registration issues encompass various state efforts, including laws, practices and policies of states that privilege certain religious groups or their members, ban, restrict or discriminate against others or limit their ability to practise their religion or beliefs, including the freedom to preach, publish or convert to another religion.

Legal commentators, rights-holders and key stakeholders argue that the existing international legal framework for protecting freedom of religion or belief fails to provide adequate or appropriate protection for a wide range of practices and beliefs that constitute indigenous spirituality. Several states have failed to protect believers of indigenous spirituality equally, often dismissing legal claims invoking their right to FoRB as a justification to deny protection of indigenous practices as well as access to and use of traditional lands.

Many human rights experts observed that indigenous spirituality was poorly understood and largely dismissed in the conceptualisation of FoRB within the international legal framework. For instance, the conceptualisations of Articles 18 of the UDHR and the ICCPR were shaped mainly by debates between Islamic and Protestant Christian groups, albeit its expansion having also been influenced by the rights of atheists in states of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Moreover, indigenous peoples' religion and traditions have too often been articulated through the lens of non-indigenous people, including theologians, lawyers and politicians. This is because the term 'religion' is a Western concept that fails to capture the full understanding of beliefs, spiritualities and worldviews, leading to a narrower interpretation of indigenous peoples' right to FoRB.

As a consequence, the legal protections provided for religious freedom in the international legal framework usually privilege Abrahamic religions, in particular Christianity and Islam. These religions are generally recognised as “voluntary, individual, textual and believed”, and centred on a clear distinction between religion and culture. On the contrary, indigenous peoples’ religions are defined as primarily “public, obligatory, collective, oral, local”, and a matter of practice rather than conventional belief. Indigenous spirituality is often oriented to indigenous peoples’ communities, local culture, identity, relationship with the ‘Creator’, traditional lands and “all their relations”, including waters and other natural resources in ways that are completely distinct from universal religions.

According to Shaheed, indigenous spirituality is broader than the universal religions. It encompasses diverse spiritual beliefs and localised practices that are “integral to [the] indigeneity” of the indigenous group in question, and their “distinctive” spiritual relationship with “traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used” lands, territories, waters, coastal seas, and other resources. In their submission to the Special Rapporteur, the Indigenous Values Initiative and American Indian Law Alliance opined that indigenous spirituality is so intrinsically intertwined with the indigenous peoples’ way of life, worldview or culture that it “cannot be divided into frameworks and categories.”

State policies and practices that govern the recognition and registration of religious groups and their activities are rooted in racism, colonisation, forced assimilation and the dispossession of indigenous people of ancestral or sacred sites. For many centuries, indigenous peoples, their spirituality, culture and other traditions have been subjected to historical and ongoing political, cultural and racial discriminatory policies and practices to deny their worldviews adequate protection. The cultural hierarchies and their supporting theories are justified on the basis of racially motivated theories, science and legal arrangements. Since the colonial era, most indigenous peoples and their cultures have been considered less worthy and inferior to colonial people and their cultures.

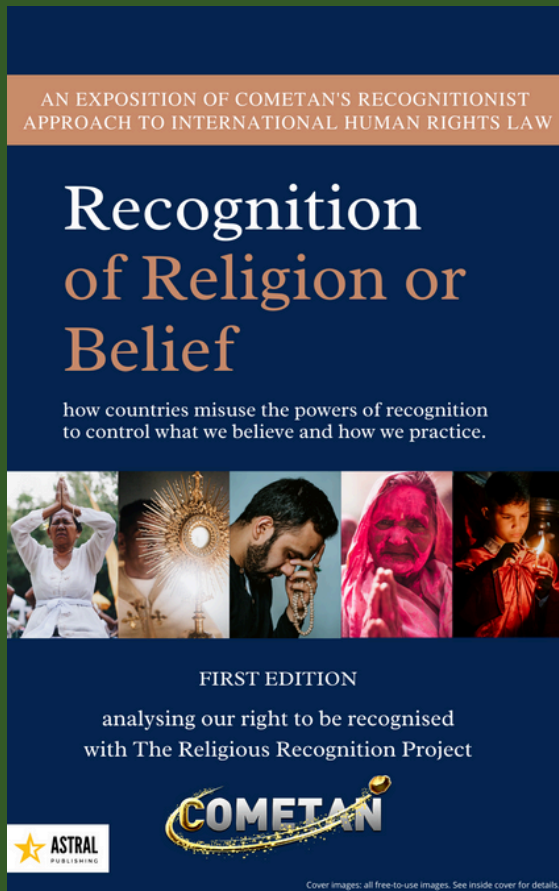
Religions such as Christianity and Islam have been used to justify the annihilation of many indigenous peoples, their worldviews and cultures and to perpetrate gross rights violations against them. This was the case in Latin America where Catholicism was instrumental in the annihilation of indigenous cultures for centuries. While such racially based cultural hierarchies have long been denounced and rejected by science, they have considerable influence on current legal regimes, policies and state practices with significant implications on the lives and practices of indigenous people in the present day. Studies show that substantial aspects of the laws that were created during the colonial era remain in current law books and continue to influence the opinions of authorities who apply the law. The Doctrine of Discovery for instance has long been used in many states as a justification to dismiss, destroy or deny recognition to indigenous spirituality.

Despite being a secular state, Canada’s laws and institutions, including in the fields of education, healthcare and social services are greatly influenced by past Christian institutional structures, teachings and traditions. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, secular Canada is structured in favour of Protestant Christian groups, including Anglicans and Presbyterians as well as Roman Catholics to some extent. The establishment of weekends (rest days), public holidays and other Christian traditions such as Easter and Christmas also favour dominant Christian groups, allowing them to attend their religious services. Canadian religious practices are deeply rooted in religious chauvinism combined with racism, sexism, classism and gender-based prejudice. These practices are rooted in Protestant Christian faiths which some sociologists have argued are Canada’s “shadow establishment.” The dismissal and delegitimisation of indigenous spirituality, ways of life and policies to ‘civilise’ and convert Canada’s indigenous peoples have been justified on the assumption that one must be Christian to be a ‘proper’ Canadian citizen.

Current U.S. laws are rooted in the legal doctrine of Christian discovery and the fifteenth-century Christian theological presumptions that justified the dispossession of indigenous peoples by transferring absolute titles to Christian sovereigns by virtue of “discovery.” Issues of religious freedom arising in the context of forced assimilation often centred on equal access of both Catholic and Protestant institutions to government resources to the neglect of indigenous groups. The law has been used as a justification for the dispossession and forced cultural assimilation of indigenous people based on a presumed lack of cognisable religion.

*Gyimah’s full article can be found in Volume 1
Issue 1 of the Journal of Astronist Studies
published August 2024.*

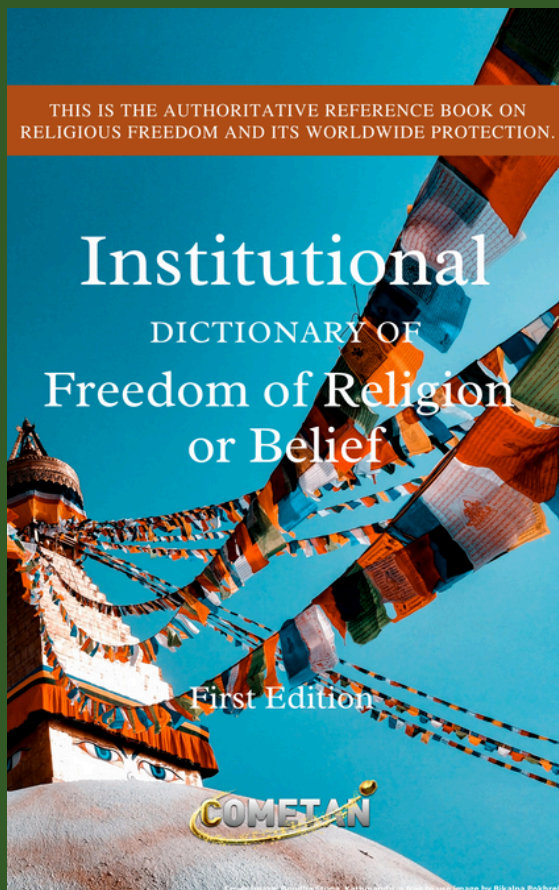
OTHER WORKS



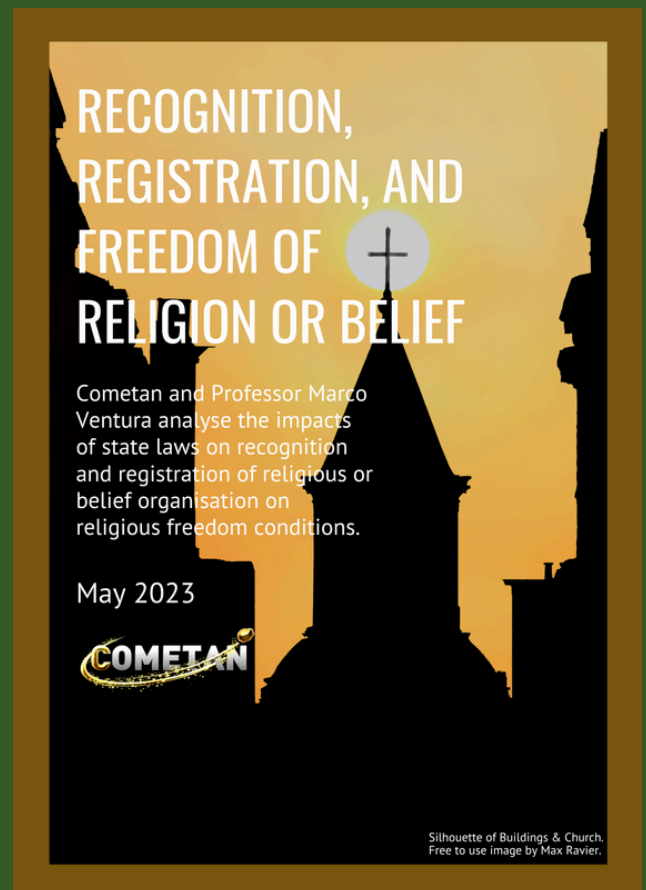
Released in July 2022.



Released in December 2019.



Released in July 2021.



Released in May 2023.