



Dominican Republic

Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **94.9%**
- Agnostics : **2.2%**
- Spiritists : **2.2%**
- Others : **0.7%**

10.649.000

48.671 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The preamble of the constitution^[1] invokes God and notes that the national emblem includes a Bible and a cross in the centre. The national motto is “God, Homeland and Freedom”

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

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

Religious marriages shall have – according to article 55 – civil effects in the terms established by law, without prejudice to the provisions of international treaties.

Although, under the constitution, the state is not confessional, a concordat is in place, signed with the Holy See in 1954, which declares that the “Catholic religion [. . .] is the Religion of the Dominican Republic and shall enjoy the rights and prerogatives due to it.”^[2]

The state recognises the international legal personality of the Holy See and of all its religious institutions and associations. It guarantees the Catholic Church the free and full exercise of its spiritual power and jurisdiction and its free and public acts of worship.

The government recognises the civil effects of marriages celebrated in accordance with canon law. It guarantees religious assistance to the members of the armed forces and facilitates religious assistance in schools, hospitals and prisons. The state guarantees the teaching of Catholic religion in public schools, except for students whose parents ask for an

exemption.

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

The General Education Law upholds freedom of education; private schools may offer religious and/or moral instruction in accordance with their own pedagogical outlook.^[4]

Law No. 198-11 regulates the terms and conditions under which the civil effects of religious marriages celebrated by non-Catholic Churches will be recognised.^[5]

In June 2016, a bill^[6] was introduced in order to guarantee and protect freedom of religion. It includes a number of provisions, including the obligation of religious entities and churches to register, a ban on any attempt to undermine public order, respect for other faiths, the right not to be subjected to discrimination because of one's religious beliefs, the right to observe the feast days and day of rest of one's religion and the right of religious entities to obtain state grants.

According to a survey by Latinobarómetro, conducted in early 2018, the number of Catholics has dropped.^[7] In 2013, more than 60 percent of the population said that they belonged to this religion, while in 2017 the figure was down to below 50 percent. For the media, the main causes for the decline are recent cases of murder and abuses committed by members of the clergy. Likewise, appreciation for the Pope as the authoritative figure in the Church has also shrunk, with a positive assessment of six on a 10-point scale.^[8]

Incidents

In September 2016, a controversy was sparked by an opinion piece that accused the new head of the General Directorate of Internal Revenue (Dirección General de Impuestos Internos) of being an enemy of the Evangelical community because of the implementation of new procedures for obtaining tax exemptions.^[9] In his response, the new director rejected the charge, described the existing regulations and explained the request for precedents in terms of applying the regulations to recently established churches.^[10]

In July 2017, transsexual anchorwoman Mía Cepeda was photographed together with presidential candidate Luis Abinader. Bishop Víctor Masalles criticised the photo on social media and was accused of discrimination.^[11]

In October 2017, a court took protective action under the constitution against a Jehovah's Witness couple who had refused to allow a blood transfusion for their new-born daughter. The court ordered the clinic to perform the blood transfusion, citing the constitution and other laws.^[12]

Prospects for freedom of religion

Prospects for religious freedom are good. As in the previous period, no incidents of intolerance have been reported. In this sense, the situation has not changed. A certain interest has developed in civil society for scholarly meetings on religion, specifically on religious freedom. Some government authorities have stressed the value of freedom of religion and of non-discrimination in religious matters and have specifically made statements to this effect. For example, the first Caribbean Religious Freedom Symposium^[13] was held in November 2017 at the Mother and Teacher Pontifical Catholic University (Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra), in Santo Domingo, on the topic of 'Religious Freedom and Economic Development'. In the opening speech, Dominican Vice President Margarita Cedeño stressed the importance for legal systems to recognise and guarantee religious freedom.^[14] Other examples of the country's pluralist atmosphere include the first Symposium on Science and Religion in October 2016 by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.^[15] In June 2017, a meeting was held between the Ministry of Tourism and the (Catholic) Ramón Pané Foundation to coordinate

activities to promote religious tourism.^[16]

Endnotes / Sources

[1]All references to the constitution are from Dominican Republic's Constitution of 2015, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Dominican_Republic_2015.pdf?lang=en), https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Dominican_Republic_2015.pdf?lang=en, (accessed 21st April 2018).

[2]Concordato entre la Santa Sede y la República Dominicana de 1954 (Concordat between the Holy ee and the Dominican Republic of 1954), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/archivio/documents/rc_seg-st_19540616_concordato-dominicana_sp.html, (accessed 8th March 2018).

[3]Articles 12 and 35, 'Ley 122-05 de Regulación y Fomento de las Asociaciones Sin Fines de Lucro' (Law 122-05 on Regulating and Promoting Non-Profit Associations), El Congreso Nacional (República Dominicana), <https://www.dgii.gov.do/legislacion/leyesTributarias/Documents/122-05.pdf>, (accessed 8th March 2018).

[4]Art 4, s 24. 'Ley 66-97 General de Educación' (General Education Law 66-97), El Congreso Nacional (República Dominicana), <https://www.dol.gov/ilab/submissions/pdf/20100408-12.pdf>, (accessed 8th March 2018).

[5]'Ley N°198-11 que regula los matrimonios religiosos y sus efectos', (Law N. 187-11 regulating religious marriages and their effects), El Congreso Nacional (República Dominicana), http://www.poderjudicial.gob.do/documentos/PDF/novedades/Novedad_Ley_198-11.pdf, (accessed 8th March 2018).

[6] Mariela Mejía, '¿Cuáles prohibiciones contiene el proyecto de ley sobre libertad religiosa?', Diario Libre, 3rd July (all other month names in the references are in English) 2016, <https://www.diariolibre.com/noticias/cuales-prohibiciones-contiene-el-proyecto-de-ley-sobre-libertad-religiosa-FM4196979>, (accessed 7th March 2018).

[7] Kirsis Díaz, 'Encuesta: dominicanos se alejan de la iglesia católica', Diario Libre, 14th January 2018, <https://www.diariolibre.com/noticias/encuesta-dominicanos-se-alejan-de-la-iglesia-catolica-KM8970268>, (accessed 7th March 2018).

[8] 'Valoración baja del papa Francisco en República Dominicana', Diario Libre, 13th January 2018, <https://www.diariolibre.com/noticias/valoracion-baja-del-papa-francisco-en-rd-LG8967683>, (accessed 7th March 2018).

[9] Carlos Peña, 'Magín Díaz, enemigo de la comunidad evangélica', Hoy digital, 3rd September 2016, <http://hoy.com.do/magin-diaz-enemigo-de-la-comunidad-evangelica/>, (accessed 15th March 2018).

[10] 'Director de la DGII niega esa entidad ponga trabas a comunidad evangélica', Hoy digital, 9th September 2016, <http://hoy.com.do/director-de-la-dgii-niega-esa-entidad-ponga-trabas-a-comunidad-evangelica/>, (accessed 15th March 2018).

[11] 'VIDEO: Mía Cepeda responde al obispo Masalles tras críticas por foto con Luis Abidanier', Diario Libre, 1st August 2017, <https://www.diariolibre.com/revista/video-mia-cepeda-responde-al-obispo-masalles-tras-criticas-por-foto-con-luis-abinader-HN7780823>, (accessed 6th March 2018).

[12] 'Tribunal ordena transfusión de sangre a recién nacida cuyos padres se oponían por religión', Diario Libre, 5th October 2017, <https://www.diariolibre.com/noticias/justicia/tribunal-ordena-transfusion-de-sangre-a-recien-nacida-cuyos-padres-se-oponian-por-religion-MF8315482>, (accessed 7th March 2018).

[13] 'PUCMM Sede del Primer Simposio de Libertad Religiosa del Caribe', Prensa PUCMM Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, 17th November 2018, <https://www.pucmm.edu.do/noticias/Lists/EntradasDeBlog/Post.aspx?List=0768e9cd-8ad1-4e02-b9e1-3b0e25e9af01&ID=1120&Web=650fac3c-9eae-495c-bcad-1e5b9446bac8>, (accessed 6th March 2018).

[14] 'Libertad Religiosa en RD y El Caribe', Vanguardia del Pueblo, 18th November 2017, <http://vanguardiadelpueblo.do/2017/11/18/libertad-religiosa-en-rd-y-el-caribe/>, (accessed 7th March 2018).

[15] Víctor Gabriel Ramírez, '1er Simposio de Ciencia y Religión, Creación con un Creador', Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día Asociación Dominicana del Sureste, 10th October 2016, <http://www.adventistassureste.org/noticias/1er-simposio-de-ciencia-y-religion-creacion-con-un-creador/>, (accessed 22nd April 2018).

[16] 'Libertad Religiosa en RD y El Caribe', Vanguardia del Pueblo, 18th November 2017, <http://vanguardiadelpueblo.do/2017/11/18/libertad-religiosa-en-rd-y-el-caribe/>, (accessed 7th March 2018).