



Religion

Population

Area

- Muslims : **45.3%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **40.7%**
- Christians : **12.7%**
- Agnostics : **1.2%**
- Others : **0.1%**

1.888.000

36.125 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Guinea-Bissau is a country of broad religious diversity, resulting from its wide ethnic mix of people.^[1] According to Article 6 of the constitution, Guinea-Bissau is a strictly secular state.^[2] Article 4 prohibits political parties from identifying with any particular Church, religion, cult, or religious doctrine. The right to freedom of religion is enshrined in law and enjoys the protection of the state. Religious communities require licences, but there are no known cases in which registration has been denied.^[3]

In the former Portuguese colony – which upholds the separation of Church and state – religious instruction is not provided in public schools.^[4] However, religious communities can offer it themselves. The state intervenes only if this instruction is in violation of the country's laws. Despite political instability and widespread poverty, there have been few religious tensions in recent decades.

Incidents

There was no significant change with regard to religious freedom during the reporting period. That said, the country faces other problems that could have a negative influence on religious life. The fight against drug smuggling from Latin America also poses huge problems for the country.^[5] More and more people, including many children, are fleeing poverty by emigrating to neighbouring countries such as Senegal.^[6] In early 2017, against a backdrop of a tense economic situation, there were increasing public demonstrations against the government of President José Mário Vaz. The United Nations and other international stakeholders working to promote peace-building activities in Guinea-Bissau have expressed concern over growing political and social tensions in the country.^[7]

Although religious freedom is guaranteed by law in Guinea-Bissau, it is under threat on several fronts. On 10th November 2014, while Guinea-Bissau's Catholic bishops were in Rome for their "ad limina" visit along with bishops from Senegal, Mauritania and Cape Verde, Pope Francis declared: "[T]oday [faith] is threatened in many ways, whether by religious proposals that are easier and more attractive on the moral plane which are appearing from every side, or by the phenomenon of secularisation which also concerns African societies."^[8] Pope Francis recommended that local Churches provide "lay people [with]... a sound doctrinal and spiritual formation" and "constant support". He called on them to "prevent the faith from becoming marginalised [from] public life".

Prospects for freedom of religion

Extremist Islam is on the rise in West Africa, threatening peace in much of the region during the period under review. It remains to be seen if this will undermine inter-faith relations in Guinea-Bissau but this is possible given that it and other poverty-stricken countries are particularly susceptible to jihadism. Foreign extremist imams are reported to be active in the country's mosques.^[9]

Endnotes / Sources

[1] For the share of different religious communities in the total population, cf. Grim, Brian et. al. (eds.): Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2017, Brill: Leiden/Boston, 2017.

[2] Guinea-Bissau's Constitution of 1984 with Amendments through 1991, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Guinea_Bissau_1991.pdf), https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Guinea_Bissau_1991.pdf, (accessed 2nd April 2018).

[3] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Guinea', International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 2nd April 2018).

[4] Ibid.

[5] 'Guinea-Bissau country profile', BBC August 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13443186>, (accessed on 10th February 2018).

[6] 'Child "beggars" of Senegal', Agenzia Fides, 31st March 2017, http://www.fides.org/en/news/62037-AFRICA_SENEGAL_Child_beggars_of_Senegal, (accessed 10th February 2018).

[7] 'Munzinger Länder: Guinea-Bissau', Munzinger Archiv 2018, <https://www.munzinger.de/search/start.jsp>, (accessed 30th March 2018).

[8] 'Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Senegal-Mauritania-Cape Verde-Guinea Bissau on their "ad limina" Visit', The Holy See, 10th November 2014, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141110_ad-limina-africa.html, (accessed on 10th February 2018).

[9] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, op. cit.