



## Religion

## Population

## Area

- Christians : **53.2%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **28.7%**
- Muslims : **17.5%**
- Others : **0.6%**

28.751.000

799.380 Km<sup>2</sup>

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Freedom of religion is enshrined in Mozambique's constitution and laws.<sup>[1]</sup> Mozambique considers itself a secular state.<sup>[2]</sup> The constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds and guarantees freedom of religious expression. Article 54 states: "All citizens shall have the freedom to practise or not to practise a religion. [ . . . ] Religious denominations shall have the right to pursue their religious aims freely and to own and acquire assets for realising their objectives.<sup>†3]</sup> With a few minor exceptions, these principles have been respected by every government since the civil war ended in 1990. Until then, freedom of religion was, at best, tolerated under the then ruling Marxist-Leninist regime. At present, religious organisations, such as Church organisations doing social or development work, must register with the Ministry of Justice.

Religious organisations are permitted to own and run schools. Religious instruction in state-run schools is prohibited<sup>[4]</sup>

An agreement between the Republic of Mozambique and the Vatican in 2012 governs the relationship between the state and the Catholic Church.<sup>[5]</sup> The agreement states that the Church is legally independent and has the right to organise its internal affairs and appoint staff and other workers.<sup>[6]</sup>

In Mozambique, the south and the cities are predominantly Christian. The north and coastline areas are home to many (mostly Sunni) Muslims. But traditional African faiths are strongly represented as well, particularly in rural regions. Religious life in Mozambique is diverse and very dynamic<sup>[7]</sup> and hence the country is considered a magnet for evangelical missionaries, for example the Brazilian Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God).<sup>[8]</sup> Because of their shared language, there are other, comparable Brazilian movements engaged in missionary work in the country.

As regards the Muslim community, young Islamic preachers study mainly in countries such as Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi

Arabia and South Africa before returning to Mozambique with a very strict interpretation of Islam.<sup>[9]</sup> As with other countries in East Africa, intolerant Islamist ideologies may take root in Mozambique.

The Churches, especially the Catholic Church, was involved in the peace process between the former military opposition RENAMO and FRELIMO, the party which has shifted from Marxism towards social-democracy and which has held power without interruption since independence in 1975. Thanks to this involvement, the Church has gained in influence in Mozambique.

The country's political situation is by no means trouble-free. In July 2013, Archbishop Emeritus Jaime Gonçalves, a central figure during the peace negotiations, complained that former RENAMO fighters had still not been integrated into the police force as provided for by the peace agreements concluded in Rome.

A sign of the Catholic Church's importance for the country's social stability and development came when RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama insisted that the Church act as a mediator in negotiations with the FRELIMO government!<sup>[10]</sup>

## | Incidents

The 2014 elections led to an increase in political tensions in Mozambique and this continued through the reporting period. Church leaders have often criticised corruption, power monopolies and separatist trends!<sup>[11]</sup>

In February 2016, a pastor of the Apostolic Faith Mission was shot by unknown attackers during a church service in Chimoio city. His widow said the motive for the murder may have been connected with tensions with other Churches!<sup>[12]</sup>

While Mozambican Muslims are regarded as moderate, radical preachers have been gaining followers for several years. Concerns over further violence have been growing since an attack on a police station in northern Mozambique in October 2017.<sup>[13]</sup> Four men attacked the police station in the port city of Mocímboa da Praia; one of the men brandished a bush knife from under his kaftan and thrust it into the face of the police officer in charge. The other attackers seized a total of 37 Kalashnikovs.

The perpetrators are thought to have been young men who had joined up with radical preachers at a mosque still under construction in the city's Nanduaue District.<sup>[14]</sup> The imams, some of whom had come from neighbouring Tanzania, are thought to have given sermons referring to local mayors and administrative and police officials as "unbelievers". Police said 52 suspects were arrested, all of them Mozambicans. They all reportedly refused to make statements about their motives and who was backing their movement.

Negotiations are ongoing between the Church and the authorities over the return of Church property seized after Mozambique gained independence. About 60 percent of the assets have already been returned and discussions continue about the rest of them.<sup>[15]</sup>

Notwithstanding these problems, there were no reports of serious religious freedom violations during the reporting period.<sup>[16]</sup> The likely reason for this is that Mozambique's religious communities have traditionally been tolerant towards one another.

## | Prospects for freedom of religion

Given the Catholic Church's commitment to human rights, its recent constructive role in the country's peace process and its strong standing in society auger well for the protection of religious freedom. However, the growth of Islamism, imported not least by preachers studying abroad, suggests that religious intolerance may become an increasing problem in Mozambique as it is in many other parts of East Africa.

## Endnotes / Sources

- [1] Mozambique's Constitution of 2004 with Amendments through 2007, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Mozambique_2007.pdf?lang=en), [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Mozambique\\_2007.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Mozambique_2007.pdf?lang=en), (accessed 12th February 2018)
- [2] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Mozambique', 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).
- [3] Mozambique's Constitution of 2004 with Amendments through 2007, op. cit.
- [4] Ibid.
- [5] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, op. cit.
- [6] Ibid.
- [7] For the share of different religious communities in the total population, cf. Grim, Brian et al. (eds.): Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2017, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017.
- [8] 'Munzinger Länder: Mozambik', Munzinger Archiv 2018, <https://www.munzinger.de/search/start.jsp>, (accessed 30th March 2018).
- [9] Ibid.
- [10] Ibid.
- [11] "'National unity threatened by the selfishness of a corrupt minority," say bishops', Agenzia Fides, 6th March 2015, [http://www.fides.org/en/news/37405-AFRICA\\_MOZAMBIQUE\\_National\\_unity\\_threatened\\_by\\_the\\_selfishness\\_of\\_a\\_corrupt\\_minority\\_say\\_Bishops](http://www.fides.org/en/news/37405-AFRICA_MOZAMBIQUE_National_unity_threatened_by_the_selfishness_of_a_corrupt_minority_say_Bishops), (accessed 2 April 2018).
- [12] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, op. cit.
- [13] Antonio Cascais, 'Angst vor islamistischer Gewalt in Mosambik', Deutsche Welle, 17th October 2017, <http://www.dw.com/de/angst-vor-islamistischer-gewalt-in-mosambik/a-40983865>, (accessed 12th February 2018).
- [14] Ibid.
- [15] Ibid.
- [16] Ibid.