



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **82.9%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **14.7%**
- Agnostics : **1%**
- Muslims : **0.7%**
- Others : **0.7%**

15.967.000

390.759 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In its preamble, Zimbabwe's 2013^[1] constitution acknowledges “the supremacy of Almighty God, in whose hands our future lies”, and implores for his “guidance”. It recognises (chapter 1, article 3) “the nation’s diverse cultural, religious and traditional values” and rights. It also guarantees, in Article 60 “the right to freedom of conscience, which includes freedom of thought, opinion, religion or belief; and freedom to practise and propagate and give expression to their thought, opinion, religion or belief, whether in public or in private and whether alone or together with others”. The same article also states: “No person may be compelled to take an oath that is contrary to their religion or belief or to take an oath in a manner that is contrary to their religion or belief.”

Article 60 goes on to say: “Parents and guardians of minor children have the right to determine, in accordance with their beliefs, the moral and religious upbringing of their children, provided they do not prejudice the rights to which their children are entitled under this constitution, including their rights to education, health, safety and welfare.” It also recognises the right of religious communities to “establish institutions where religious instruction may be given, even if the institution receives a subsidy or other financial assistance from the state.”

For its part, the 2002 Public Order and Security Act (POSA)^[2] effectively restricts freedom of assembly and association by requiring police permission for public meetings and demonstrations. It gives police the authority to impose arbitrary curfews, and forbids criticism of the president. Although POSA exempts religious activities and events, in practice the authorities have consistently branded as “political” any kind of gatherings – including religious ones – that it interpreted as critical of ZANU-PF, the ruling party. POSA has been invoked at different times to justify police disruption of religious meetings, on the grounds that organisers had not sought permission from the authorities.

There is no law requiring religious groups to register. However, religious groups operating schools or health facilities must

register with the appropriate ministry. All religious groups can apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges from the Customs Department. Such requests are generally granted without much complication.

The government observes Easter and Christmas as national holidays.

| Incidents

On 25th September 2017, an Evangelical pastor called Evan Mawarine went on trial on charges of attempting to subvert the government, following protests in 2016 against President Robert Mugabe's handling of the economy. The pastor was arrested at Harare airport on 1st February 2017. Through his #ThisFlag movement, he had called on his fellow citizens to stay at home and urged them to speak out against economic problems and government failure to pay workers. He was finally acquitted of all charges on 29th November. The High Court ruling came a week after President Mugabe, who had ruled for nearly 40 years, was ousted by Zimbabwe's military. High Court judge Priscilla Chigumba said in her ruling: "There is no evidence that he [Mawarine] urged a violent removal of government."^[3] Pastor Mawarine's trial appears to have been motivated by his social activism rather than by his status as a religious leader.

The Catholic Church represents a minority of about 10 percent of the population but has always been seen as highly influential in Zimbabwe. During the 2016-2018 period, it reportedly enjoyed broad freedom in its evangelising activities and social outreach. Some Catholic clergy consulted for this report concur that, although Robert Mugabe's government had, at times, regarded the activities of the Justice and Peace diocesan commissions with suspicion, in general, it did not curtail their programmes and avoided open confrontation^[4] with religious groups critical of the country's political regime. The new authorities who took over the country after Mr Mugabe was ousted have so far maintained the same line with regard to religious tolerance.

| Prospects for freedom of religion

Given the absence of serious incidents against religious freedom and the fact that religious groups can freely worship and conduct their charitable activities, it can be safely concluded that there was a reasonable degree of religious freedom in the country.

| Endnotes / Sources

[1] Zimbabwe's Constitution of 2013, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org), https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Zimbabwe_2013.pdf (accessed 6th February 2018).

[2] 'Public Order and Security Act', International Labour Organization, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=85399 (accessed 14th February 2018).

[3] AFP, 'Zimbabwe acquits pastor of trying to overthrow Mugabe', 29th November 2017, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/Zimbabwe/zimbabwe-acquits-pastor-of-trying-to-overthrow-mugabe-20171129> (accessed 14th February 2018).

[4] Interview on 30th November 2017 with a Catholic priest working in Zimbabwe for over 40 years.