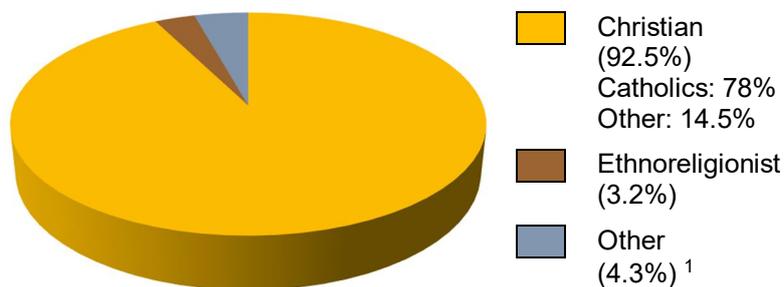


# BOLIVIA



Area <sup>2</sup> :	Population <sup>3</sup> :	Political system:	Major Language(s):
1.1 million km <sup>2</sup>	10.2 million	Democracy <sup>4</sup>	Spanish

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia (Article 4) notes that the State respects and guarantees freedom of religion and spiritual beliefs in accordance with its worldviews. The State is independent of religion. The State prohibits and punishes all forms of discrimination based on sex, colour, age, origin, culture, religion, ideology, political or philosophical affiliation. (Article 14). The constitution guarantees the right to freedom of thought, spirituality, religion and worship, individually or collectively, in public and in private, for lawful purposes (Article 21). The right of indigenous nations and peoples to their cultural identity, religious beliefs, spirituality, practices and customs and their own worldview is expressly protected. Protection is given to sacred sites, traditional learning and knowledge, traditional medicine, rituals and symbols (Article 30). Schools must recognise and guarantee freedom of conscience and faith, as well as the freedom to teach religion and the spirituality of indigenous nations and peoples. They should promote respect and coexistence between people from different religious backgrounds. There shall be no discrimination on the basis of religious choice with respect to admission and presence in school (Article 86). The management of educational institutions by religious bodies is recognised and respected (Article 87). The wealth inherent in religious worship and folklore is part of the cultural heritage of the Bolivian people (Article 99). No minister of religion can exercise any elected public office unless he has resigned three months prior to the day of the election.<sup>5</sup> In 1986, the Holy See and the Republic of Bolivia signed an agreement on the provision of religious assistance to the Armed Forces and the National Police Forces.<sup>6</sup>

## Incidents

As part of an ongoing national debate, in July 2014 Catholic priest Father Miguel Manzanera came out against abortion as promoted by ideologies that do not consider the embryo as a complete human being.<sup>7</sup> In September 2014, several evangelical leaders expressed concern regarding Law 351 (2013) on Granting Legal Personality and its Regulations (Supreme Decree 1597 of 30<sup>th</sup> April 2014) regarding the legal status and registration of churches, religious groups and spiritual beliefs "whose objectives do not involve profit". The issue stems from the fact that organisations must register again and that such rules impose limits on the work of various religious and non-governmental organisations. An appeal to the Constitutional Plurinational Court is pending.<sup>8</sup>

During his visit to Bolivia, Pope Francis took part in the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements. In his address, he apologised for the Church's offences and crimes against indigenous peoples during the "so-called conquest of America".<sup>9</sup> In February 2016, the Vice President of Bolivia, Garcia Linera, said on the TV programme, *La Verdad nos hace libres* (The Truth makes us free), that the constitution of Bolivia guarantees that no religious practice can be discriminated against in the country, since it is a secular state and as such a guarantor of all beliefs. Linera added that for several years there were plans to pass a law on religious freedom regulating the activity of religions and allowing them to obtain an "identity". That said, he noted that people must be patient in waiting for the law to be approved, recognising that everyone wants to reach a consensus, especially the various religions.<sup>10</sup>

Also in February 2016, the Ministry of Communication announced that Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, planned to invite representatives of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bolivia to coordinate Pope Francis' visit the following July. Morales added that the Pope's visit was meant to be entirely pastoral and intended to strengthen religions, especially the Catholic Church. He also noted that it would be inconceivable for him as well as discriminatory for representatives of the Catholic Church not to be present at inter-faith ceremonies celebrating anniversaries in the country's departments (regions). In addition, he said that every international institution or figure was free to speak on matters they deem unjust.<sup>11</sup>

### **Prospects for freedom of religion**

Bolivia's social and political conflict has had an impact on the country's complex social environment. This in turn has affected religious organisations in some ways, such as whether their legal status safeguards their freedom and autonomy to fulfil their mission.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country\\_27\\_1.asp](http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_27_1.asp) accessed on 16 March 2016.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-18727507> accessed on 6 May 2016.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-18727507> accessed on 6 May 2016.

<sup>4</sup> As defined by its constitution (Article 1), Bolivia is a "Unitary Social State of Plurinational Communitarian Law that is free, independent, sovereign, democratic, intercultural, decentralised and with autonomies.";

[http://www.comunicacion.gob.bo/sites/default/files/docs/Nueva\\_Constitucion\\_Politica\\_del\\_Estado\\_Boliviano\\_0.pdf](http://www.comunicacion.gob.bo/sites/default/files/docs/Nueva_Constitucion_Politica_del_Estado_Boliviano_0.pdf) accessed on 1 March 2016.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.comunicacion.gob.bo/sites/default/files/docs/Nueva\\_Constitucion\\_Politica\\_del\\_Estado\\_Boliviano\\_0.pdf](http://www.comunicacion.gob.bo/sites/default/files/docs/Nueva_Constitucion_Politica_del_Estado_Boliviano_0.pdf) accessed on 1 March 2016.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/secretariat\\_state/archivio/documents/rc\\_seg-st\\_19861201\\_santa-sede-bolivia\\_sp.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/archivio/documents/rc_seg-st_19861201_santa-sede-bolivia_sp.html) accessed on el 18/03/16.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.celir.cl/v2/Boletines/bjullX.pdf> accessed on 3 March 2016.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.bpnnews.net/43293/las-leyes-bolivianas-amenazan--seriamente-la-libertad-religiosa> accessed on 18 March 2016.

<sup>9</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150709\\_bolivia-movimenti-popolari.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150709_bolivia-movimenti-popolari.html) accessed on 18 March 2016.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.vicepresidencia.gob.bo/El-vicepresidente-afirmo-que-la-CPE-garantiza-que-ninguna-practica-religiosa> accessed on 3 March 2016.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.comunicacion.gob.bo/?q=20150210/17647> accessed on 3 March 2016.