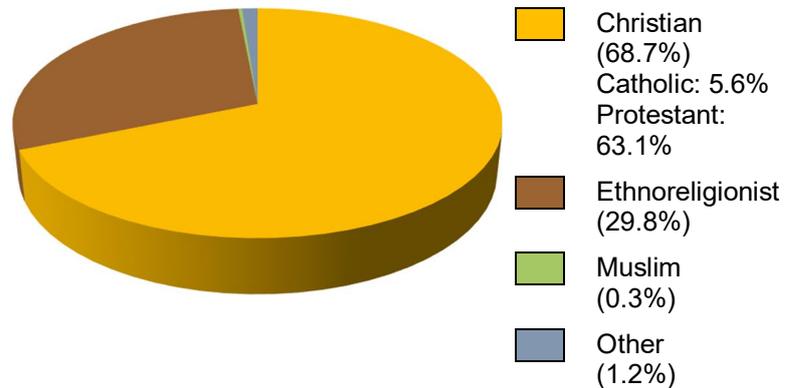
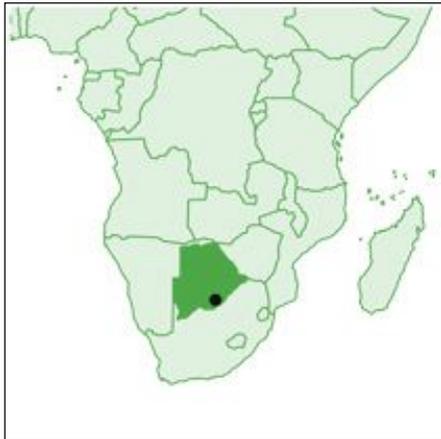


BOTSWANA



Area: 581,730 km ²	Population: 2,560,100	Political system: Democracy	Major Language(s): English, Setswana
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Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Constitution of the Republic of Botswana, from 1966, reformed in 1994 and 1997, guarantees the “freedom of conscience”, which includes “freedom of thought and of religion, freedom to change his or her religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate his or her religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance” (article 11). It further adds that “Every religious community shall be entitled, at its own expense, to establish and maintain places of education and to manage any place of education which it wholly maintains; and no such community shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for persons of that community in the course of any education provided at any place of education which it wholly maintains or in the course of education which it otherwise provides”. It finally states that “except with his or her own consent (or, if he or she is a minor, the consent of his or her guardian) no person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if that instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his or her own”.

Religious groups must register with the Registrar of Societies at the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, but the process is usually simple and does not take more than a few months. There are no legal benefits for registered organizations, although without this registration, religious groups cannot sign valid contracts, conduct business or open a bank account.

The government observes the following religious feasts as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas. In the country there are significant religious minorities, including Muslims and Hindus, who are usually migrant foreign workers. Although the country only recognizes Christian holidays, members of other religious groups are allowed to observe their feasts without any government interference.

Incidents

During the period covered by this report, there were no incidents of inter-religious tensions, or of intolerance, discrimination or persecution against any religious group.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Botswana is predominantly Christian, but with the presence of strong religious minorities such as the Baha'i, Muslims (mostly from South Asian origin) and Hindus. A growing percentage of its nominally Christian population has no religious beliefs. The government acknowledges religious pluralism and it encourages inter-religious dialogue and cooperation.