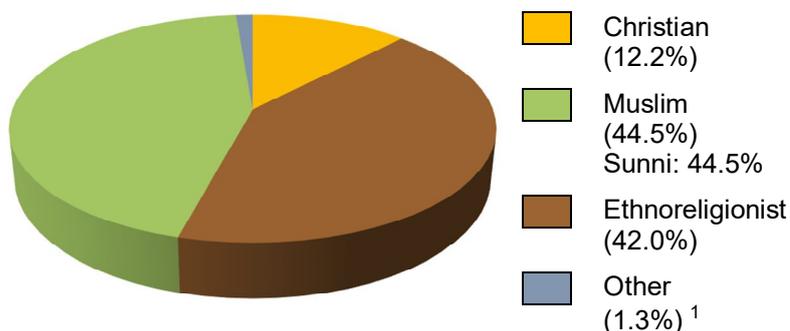
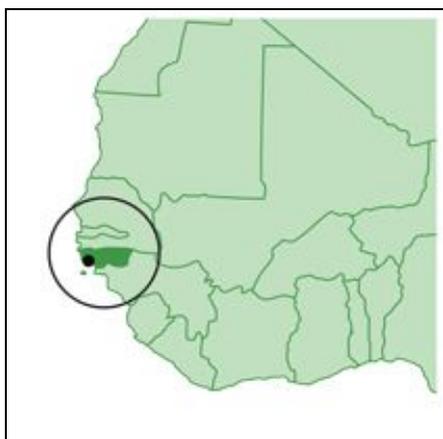


GUINEA BISSAU



Area: 36,125 km ²	Population²: 1,726,170	Political system: Autocracy ³	Major Language(s): Portuguese, Creole, French, English ⁴
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Freedom of religion in theory and in practice

The Republic of Guinea Bissau in West Africa is a country of wide religious diversity. This diversity is also reflected in the ethnic make-up of the population.

According to article 6 of the constitution, Guinea Bissau is a strictly secular nation. Article 4 therefore prohibits political parties from identifying with any particular Church, religious group, doctrine or form of worship. At the same time, the fundamental right to religious freedom is enshrined in law and is in practice protected by the government. Religious groups are required to obtain a licence, although there is no indication that any applications for such a licence have been refused.⁵

Under the strictly secular character of this former Portuguese colony, there is no religious instruction in the state schools. However, religious communities are permitted to offer such instruction on their own initiative, without interference by the state, provided the instruction does not break the law. In recent decades, despite the unstable political situation and the enduring poverty in the country, there have been few tensions of a religious nature.

Incidents

There has been no notable change during the period of this report. The country's biggest challenges lie elsewhere. With coups and frequent changes of government, there is political instability and a lack of internal security. In addition, drug smuggling from Latin America is a huge problem.⁶

Nonetheless, despite the statutory existence of religious freedom, there are various dangers to faith in Guinea Bissau. When the country's Catholic bishops joined hierarchy from Senegal, Mauritania, Cape Verde and for an ad limina meeting in Rome on 10th November 2014, Pope Francis told them: "The Catholic faith in some countries of Africa is threatened from two sides – on the one hand from religious notions which in the moral field are easier and less demanding, and on the other by the phenomenon of secularisation."⁷ Pope Francis recommended that in response the local Churches do more to invest in a "solid, doctrinal and spiritual instruction and ongoing formation of the laity" and to provide the laity with "permanent support". He warned them to beware

“that the faith is not pushed to one side in public life”. The Pope also emphasised the need for seminarians to receive intensive training so they can carry out inter-religious dialogue in everyday life.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

It remains to be seen whether and to what extent the spread of jihadist Islamic fundamentalism in West Africa, already responsible for an increasing number of attacks in the region, will impact on relations between the religions in Guinea Bissau.

¹ Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA),

² CIA 2016: The World Factbook, estimate, July 2015

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy_Index, cf. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13443186>

⁴ Creole 90.4%, Portuguese 27.1% (official language), French 5.1%, English 2.9%, other languages 2.4%

⁵ U.S. Department of State; International Religious Freedom Report for 2014

⁶ BBC country profile Guinea-Bissau (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13443186>)

⁷ http://de.radiovaticana.va/storico/2014/11/10/papst_an_afrikanische_bisch%C3%B6fe_laien_besser_ausbilden/ted-835611