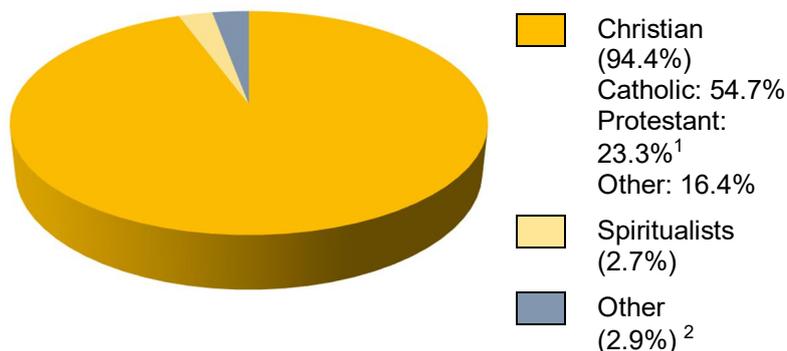


# HAITI



Area:	Population <sup>3</sup> :	Political system:	Major Language(s):
27,750 km <sup>2</sup>	10.2 million	Autocracy <sup>4</sup>	French, Haitian Creole

Although the 2006 census reported that few Haitians chose Voodoo as their religion, many more are involved in its practices without considering it their main religion.<sup>5</sup>

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application<sup>6</sup>

The constitution guarantees the right to freedom of conscience and states that all religions and beliefs can be exercised freely and that everyone has the right to profess their religion, provided they do not disturb public order. It also repeals the 1935 Decree-Law on superstitious beliefs. No one may be compelled to belong to a religious organisation or to follow a teaching contrary to their convictions. The law sets out the conditions for recognising religions. Labour unions are considered non-profit, non-denominational, and non-partisan organisations. The right to private property is also guaranteed for foreigners and foreign institutions, including for religious purposes. Centres of African beliefs are protected by the State, as part of the country's historical and cultural heritage.

The Government must appoint a representative of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Haiti and a representative of Protestant religions to the nine-member Provisional Electoral Council.<sup>7</sup> Although Catholicism is not the official religion, a concordat has been in place with the Catholic Church since 1860 under which the government provides financial support to Catholic priests, schools and organised religious groups.

The law regulates the establishment and operations of religious groups. The Bureau of Worship is responsible for registering churches, clergy, and missionaries. Registration with the Bureau of Worship provides civil recognition to documents such as marriage and baptismal certificates. Registered religious groups enjoy tax-exempt status, but must submit an annual report of their activities.

While the Voodoo religion and places of worship are recognised by law, Voodoo leaders are not yet eligible to conduct legally recognised marriages. Conversely, Islam is not recognised by law and Islamic marriages cannot be registered civilly. The government has not provided any explanation for this.

In prison, inmates have access to a Protestant minister, a Catholic priest or Voodoo leader. Faced with requests for Muslim religious services, the government has indicated that it does not have the capacity to provide every kind of religious service, especially outside of the capital, Port-au-Prince.<sup>8</sup>

## Incidents

Haiti has been going through a major political crisis since 2014, and several political institutions have been paralysed. On 12<sup>th</sup> January 2015, the mandate of the Chamber of Deputies and of two-thirds of the Senate ended, but no new elections were held. The Catholic Church intervened through a reconciliation initiative called "Together for the good of Haiti".<sup>9</sup>

In January 2015, the fifth anniversary of Haiti's earthquake, the Salesian missionaries highlighted the urgent need to educate the country's children and youth, many of whom continue to live in Displaced Person's camps.<sup>10</sup>

In October 2015, Church leaders expressed concern over the violence and killings sparked by the upcoming general election. They complained about organisational shortcomings, and the lack of a real election campaign. Unlike the Protestant denominations, the Catholic Church rejected the idea of supporting a political party to represent them.<sup>11</sup>

The Catholic Church plays a mediatory role in society in order to find peaceful solutions, without actively participating in the country's political life.

## Prospects for freedom of religion

Haiti is going through a major political crisis, involving legislative and executive branches of government. Haiti's various religions are treated differently. Muslim representatives have unsuccessfully sought official recognition. Many Christian groups, by contrast, seem to have no intention of seeking state recognition.

During the period under review, Islam continued to be discriminated against. Haiti's challenge is to offer the same legal treatment to all confessions, as well as to ensure a distance between political-governmental activities and religious practice, especially considering the state's policy of annual monitoring of officially recognised religious groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Baptists: 15.4%, Pentecostals: 7.9%

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country\\_103\\_1.asp](http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_103_1.asp) accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19548810> accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2016

<sup>4</sup> Haiti is subjected to the poverty, environmental degradation, violence, instability and dictatorship and the poorest nation in the Americas. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country\\_profiles/1202772.stm#leaders](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1202772.stm#leaders)

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country\\_103\\_2.asp](http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_103_2.asp) accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

<sup>6</sup> <http://romania.usembassy.gov/2014-irf-en.html>

<sup>7</sup>[http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country\\_103\\_6.asp](http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_103_6.asp) accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

<sup>8</sup><http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238764.pdf> accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

<sup>9</sup><http://www.lastampa.it/2015/04/22/vaticaninsider/es/en-el-mundo/en-hait-la-iglesia-est-en-primera-lnea-para-la-reconstruccin-del-pas-XtxlgM4B7uckmwmAVbs1iO/pagina.html> accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

<sup>10</sup><https://es.zenit.org/articulos/haiti-educacion-para-fortalecer-al-pais/> accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

<sup>11</sup><https://es.zenit.org/articulos/haiti-elecciones-del-domingo-marcadas-por-la-violencia/> accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2016.