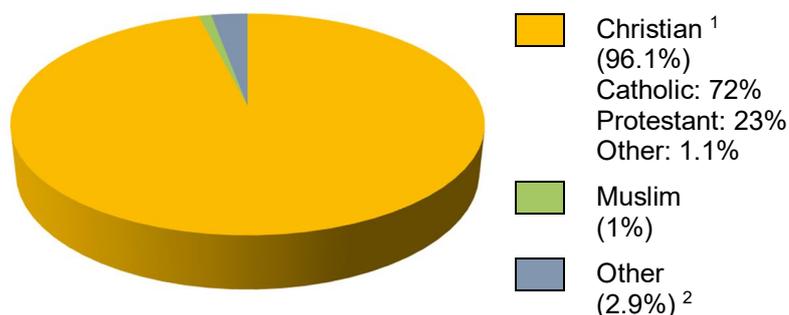
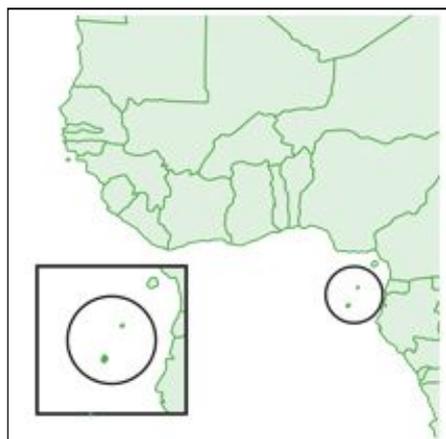


SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE



Area: 386 km ²	Population: 190,000	Political system: Democracy	Major Language(s): Portuguese, Forro, Angolar, Principense
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Legal framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

The Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe consists of two archipelagos around the two main islands in the Gulf of Guinea, off the western equatorial coast of Central Africa. The Portuguese-speaking island nation lay uninhabited until its discovery by a Portuguese expedition in the fifteenth century. The country saw cycles of social unrest and economic insecurity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries before independence was achieved peacefully in 1975. The second smallest African country after the Seychelles, São Tomé and Príncipe remains one of Africa's most settled and democratic countries. The Portuguese legacy is visible in the country's culture and customs which combine African and European influences.

The total population was estimated to be 190,000 in July 2014 and statistics from the Roman Catholic bishop's office estimate that more than 85 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, about 12 percent are Protestant, and less than two percent are Muslim. Protestant groups are active in the country and include Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, and evangelical groups, such as the Evangelic Assembly of Christ, the Universal Church of Christ, and the Thokoist Church. An increase in the migrant population from Nigeria, Cameroon and other African countries has led to a rise in the number of Muslims in the last 10 years.³

Some Christian and Muslim citizens adhere to aspects of indigenous beliefs derived from the religions of African coastal societies. Religious brotherhoods led by native priests also organise religious festivals in honour of the patron saints of towns and parishes and many people travel to attend such ceremonies. Such festivals encourage individuals to seek out the help of ritual authorities to grant protection from opponents, rid them of illness, or gain the attention of a potential lover. As a result of this mix of culture and religions, for many Catholics, while baptisms and funerals are carefully observed Catholic rituals, other sacraments are rarely respected.

The constitution provides for the freedom of religion and equality regardless of belief. Most recently amended in 2003, the 1975 constitution grants religious groups self-government, though groups must register their organisation with the government. Article 15 gives equality to all citizens

“without distinction as to social or racial origin, sex, political tendencies, religious beliefs or political convictions”. Article 27 states that “no person may be persecuted, deprived of his rights or exempt from his duties and obligations in consequence of his religious convictions or practices” and defines religious freedom as “inviolable”. Collecting information concerning an individual’s personal faith or religious identity is only permitted for statistical purposes and the contribution of personal data is entirely voluntary and the refusal to give such information cannot lead to adverse consequences.

Religious groups are guaranteed educational rights. Article 8 defines the country as “secular...in respect for all the religious institutions” yet the state cannot “reserve for itself the right to plan education and culture according to any philosophical, political, ideological or religious policies” according to Article 30, part 2.⁴ Although the government has labelled education as a priority, it has limited funds for training which has led to a decline in the quality of teaching.

Religious groups must register in order to be recognised by the government by submitting a request to the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Parliamentary Affairs. After the payment of applicable notarial fees is made, the organisation may then operate without any restrictions and will not need to register again. There were no reports of the government refusing to register or preventing a religious group from registering.

Incidents

There were no incidents reported during the period under review.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

Freedom House’s report on Freedom in the World 2015 noted that freedom of expression in general is guaranteed by the law and respected in practice. Freedoms of assembly and association are also respected and religious groups are free to gather to worship. In the annual survey published by Freedom House, São Tomé and Príncipe received a score of two for political rights, civil rights and as its overall freedom rating on a scale from one (most free) to seven (least free).⁵

During the time under review, no reports of significant government or societal actions affecting religious freedom were made and the status of religious freedom remained largely unchanged.

¹ http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_195_2.asp

² Including Baha’i: 2.38%

³ <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238464.pdf>

⁴ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Sao_Tome_and_Principe_1990.pdf

⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/s-o-tom-and-pr-ncipe>