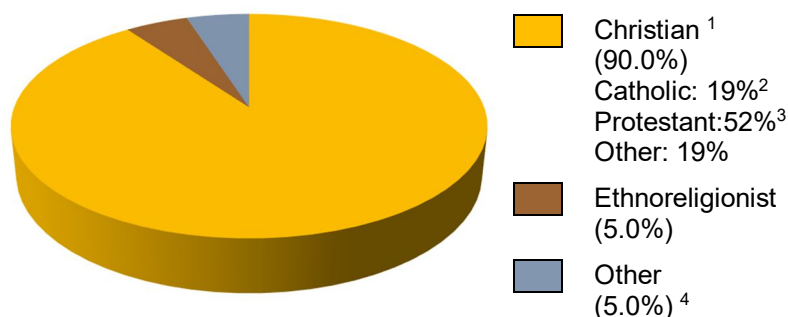


SOLOMON ISLANDS



Area: 17,955 km ²	Population⁵: 575,000	Political system: Monarchy	Major Language(s): English
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Legal framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

Solomon Islands in Oceania is a sovereign country consisting of a large number of islands to the east of Papua New Guinea. The country became a British protectorate in the 1890s, finally achieving self-governance in 1976 and independence in 1978. As a constitutional monarchy, Queen Elizabeth II is currently the head of state and the constitution protects religious freedom.

As of July 2014, the total population was estimated to be 575,500 and approximately 90 percent of the people are affiliated with Christianity. More than a third of the population follow the Anglican Church of Melanesia, making it the most dominant denomination, closely followed by the Roman Catholic Church, South Seas Evangelicals, Seventh-day Adventists and United Methodists. The Kwaio ethnic community, which adheres to an indigenous, animistic religion, comprises five percent of the population and the remaining population include small numbers of members of the Baha'i faith, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and members of the Unification Church. Though the minority faiths represent a small percentage of the population, evidence suggests they are growing. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints unveiled a new district centre building in Talise area, Honiara in November 2015 and encouraged members of the public to visit and learn more about their beliefs.

As the majority religion, Christianity permeates all areas of national life. Religious groups operate several schools and medical services. Most of the schools run by Christian groups such as the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church of Melanesia receive government subsidies and the public school curriculum includes an hour of daily religious instruction. The content of this instruction is decided by the five member churches of the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) but parents who object are able to have their children excused from religious education.

Through the Ministry of Home Affairs, the government has continued its balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free expression and maintaining public order, according to the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour International Religious Freedom Report for 2014.⁶

Incidents

Although islanders were largely tolerant of different religious beliefs, there were some reports of societal disputes within religious groups. Violence within faith communities in rural areas occurred when control over financial or land assets of the faith community were at risk. The situation was exacerbated by ethnic or political divisions within the community. In some cases, the government intervened to mediate disputes. The SICA, an ecumenical non-governmental organisation, also plays a leading role in society and promotes positive inter-faith relations. The group organised joint religious activities and has encouraged a variety of religious representation at national events.

The government requires religious institutions to register their organisation, though no group has been denied the opportunity to register. The constitution guarantees citizens the right to practise, change and proselytise and provides for the freedom to establish non-compulsory religious education.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

Solomon Islands have continued to discuss policies on religious freedom with the US government through the embassy in Papua New Guinea and the consular agency office. Representatives of the embassy met with members of the Baha'i community, the Anglican Church of Melanesia, South Seas Evangelical Church and Catholic nuns to focus on the importance of religious freedom.

¹ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

² http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_204_2.asp

³ Anglican: 35% Protestant South Seas Evangelical: 17%

⁴ Muslim, Baha'i, The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witness

⁵ <http://countryeconomy.com/demography/population/solomon-islands>

⁶ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>