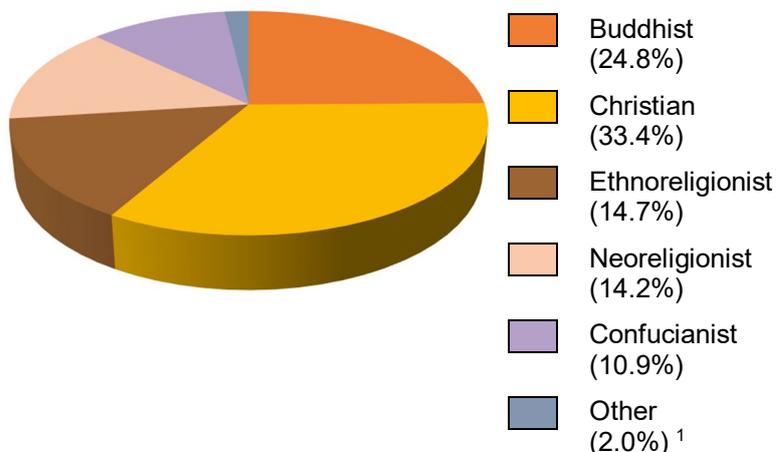


SOUTH KOREA



Area: 99,313 km ²	Population: 48.6 million	Political system: Democracy	Major Language(s): Korean
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Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Republic of Korea (South Korea) stands in stark contrast to North Korea in its protection of democratic political freedoms and freedom of religion or belief. The constitution guarantees freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, and recognises no State religion. Religious organisations and foreign religious workers are not required to register and retain complete autonomy. There is a clear separation between 'Church' and 'state', and the only religious holidays are Christmas and the Buddha's birthday.

Incidents

According to research, there were no incidents which had a direct detriment with regard to freedom of religion or belief. However, according to the U.S. State Department's International Religious Freedom report, South Korea maintains a policy of mandatory national military service and has not respected the principle of conscientious objection. While religious freedom is generally not hindered in South Korea, there are approximately 600 conscientious objectors currently in prison in the country for their refusal to undertake military service. Of these, some are motivated by their religious convictions, including 100 Jehovah's Witnesses.²

Prospects for freedom of religion

South Korea is a country of significant religious diversity, where the Catholic Church represents approximately 11 percent and plays an active role in society. In 2014 Pope Francis visited the country and beatified 124 Korean Catholic martyrs who were victims of religious persecution in the nineteenth century. A country that was once the scene of horrific persecution and war, and is one half of a peninsular torn apart by conflict, has become a beacon of freedom and democracy in Asia.

¹ http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_124_2.asp

² US State Department International Religious Freedom Report 2014 - <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>