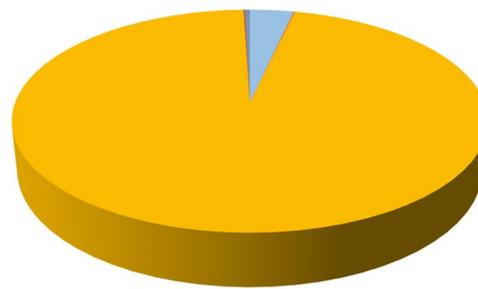
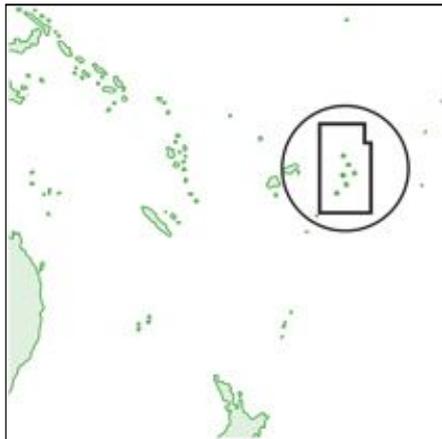


TONGA



Bahá'í	(3.5%)
Buddhist	(0.1%)
Christian	(95.8%)
Catholic:	16%
Protestant:	67%
Other:	12.8%
Hindu	(0.1%)
Other	(0.5%)

Area: 748 km ²	Population: 105,000	Political system: Monarchy	Major Language(s): Tongan, English
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Legal framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

The Kingdom of Tonga is a Polynesian sovereign state and an island nation comprising of 177 islands. Around 52 of the islands in the southern Pacific Ocean are inhabited by its 106,000 people, the majority of which live on the main island of Tongatapu. An estimated 98 percent of the population are Tongans, 1.5 percent are mixed Tongans and a small number are European. The number of Chinese citizens decreased dramatically after the anti-Chinese riots in 2006 which caused many people to migrate. In 2010, Tonga became a constitutional monarchy, having never given up its sovereignty to a foreign power. Following this, legislative reforms allowed for Tonga's first partial representative elections.

The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga is the established religion in the country although only a third of the population adhere to it. The Tongan King, Tupou VI, is a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and Christianity deeply affects the everyday lives of the Tongan people and is incorporated into elements of local culture. The constitution declares the Sabbath a sacred day and all trade and entertainment ceases on a Sunday regardless of a business owner's religion. According to the constitution, "The Sabbath Day shall be kept holy in Tonga and no person shall practise his trade or profession or conduct any commercial undertaking on the Sabbath Day except according to law; and any agreement made or witnessed on that day shall be null and void and of no legal effect."¹

A third of the population adhere to Roman Catholicism and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints while the remainder form the Free Church of Tonga and the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Tonga. According to Every Culture, while many people in Tonga consider themselves to be Christians, they may also observe some aspects of earlier Tongan beliefs and practice.² Seers and mediums still exist in society to perform rituals and drive out evil spirits and many people still respect ancient cultural taboos such as banning the hunting of certain animals associated with local clans or tribes.

The government continued to recommend that Church groups register for tax purposes but did not require them to do so. The government permitted all registered religious groups to import goods intended for religious purposes duty-free but did not subsidise any religious group or grant them

tax-exempt status. All religious groups are permitted to participate in a free hour of broadcasting church services on the radio each Sunday through the government-owned Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC). Guidelines for the TBC state that due to “the character of the listening public,” those who preach on TV Tonga and Radio Tonga must confine their preaching “within the limits of the mainstream Christian tradition.” However there were no reports of TBC denying any request by a religious group to broadcast on public channels and notices of activities for all churches were broadcast on Radio Tonga, TV Tonga, and on private stations.

Foreign missionaries are active in Tonga and are able to operate without registration.

Incidents

There were no incidents reported during the time under review.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

During the time under review, there were no reports of government actions affecting provisions made by the constitution for religious freedom and no reports of societal actions affecting the freedom of religious practice.³ The constitution does not forbid individuals from changing their faith and religious groups may operate their own schools.

¹ http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=200829 Part 1:6

² <http://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/Tonga.html>

³ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>