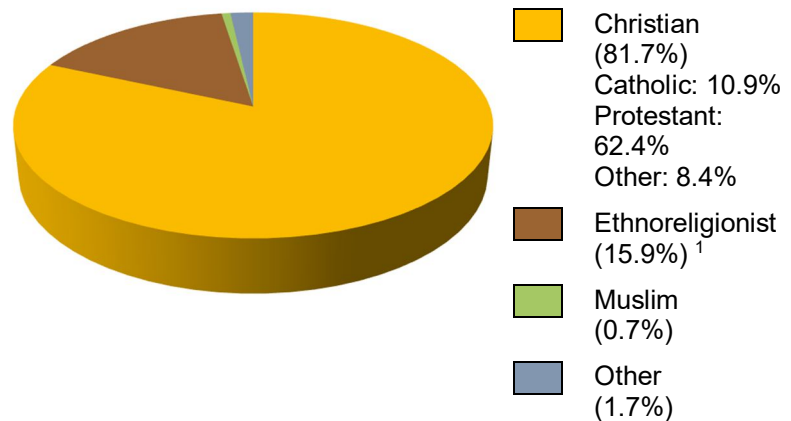


ZIMBABWE



Area:
390,759 km²

Population:
14.6 million

Political system:
Democracy

Major Language(s):
English, Shona,
Ndebele²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Constitution, in its preamble, acknowledges “the supremacy of Almighty God in whose hands our future lies” and “implores His guidance”, recognizes “the nation’s diverse religious values” and the people’s rights. It guarantees “the right to freedom of conscience, which includes freedom of thought, opinion, religion or belief; and freedom to practice and propagate and give expression to their thought, opinion, religion or belief, whether in public or in private and whether alone or together with others” (article 60). It also states that “no person may be compelled to take an oath that is contrary to their religion or belief or to take an oath in a manner that is contrary to their religion or belief”.

It further states that “parents and guardians of minor children have the right to determine, in accordance with their beliefs, the moral and religious upbringing of their children, provided they do not prejudice the rights to which their children are entitled under this Constitution, including their rights to education, health, safety and welfare”. It also recognizes the right of religious communities to “establish institutions where religious instruction may be given, even if the institution receives a subsidy or other financial assistance from the State”.

The 2002 Public Order and Security Act (POSA) effectively restricts freedom of assembly and association, and it requires police permission for public meetings and demonstrations, allows police to impose arbitrary curfews, and forbids criticism of the president. Although POSA exempts religious activities and events, in practice the government brands as “political” any kind of gatherings – including religious ones – potentially critical of ZANU-PF, the ruling party. The POSA has been invoked at different times to justify police disruption of religious meetings, alleging that the organizers had not sought permission from the authorities.

There is no law requiring religious groups to register. However, religious groups operating schools or health facilities must register with the appropriate ministry. Any religious denomination may apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges from the customs’ department. Such requests are generally granted without much complication.

The government observes Easter and Christmas as national holidays.

Incidents

During the time covered by this report, no significant cases of discrimination on religious grounds or cases of restrictions to the right to religious freedom were signaled.

Nevertheless, while freedom of worship is generally respected in Zimbabwe, the preaching and some activities from some religious institutions, such as Caritas and Justice and Peace (from the Catholic Church), are often regarded with suspicion by the authorities, particularly in times of crisis.

Prospects for freedom of religion

No changes are foreseen for the near future.

¹ Animists

² Chewa, Chibarwe, English, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, sign language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa