



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#) » [Releases](#) » [International Religious Freedom](#) » [July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report](#) » [Western Hemisphere](#) » [Dominican Republic](#)

Dominican Republic

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country, which occupies two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, has an area of 18,815 square miles and a population of 9.8 million. The largest religious group is the Roman Catholic Church. Traditional Protestants, evangelical Christian groups (particularly Assemblies of God, Church of God, Baptists, and Pentecostals), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have a much smaller but generally growing presence. According to a 2006 population survey by the Gallup Organization, the population was 39.8 percent Catholic (practicing), 29.1 percent Catholic (nonpracticing), and 18.2 percent evangelical Protestant. In the same study, 10.6 percent stated they had no religion. The Dominican Confederation of Evangelical Unity claimed evangelicals represented 16 to 20 percent of the population.

There are approximately 300 Jews. Most live in Santo Domingo, which has two synagogues and one rabbi. There is a synagogue for the small Jewish community in Sosua, which is led by a community leader, but there is no ordained rabbi. There are approximately 700 to 800 Muslims, including foreign students. There are a small number of Buddhists and

Hindus. Some Catholics practiced a combination of Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean beliefs (santería), witchcraft (brujería), or voodoo (vodou), but because these practices were usually concealed, the number of adherents was unknown.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. The 2010 constitution extends to other religious groups the right to celebrate religious marriages and provides them all civil rights in accordance with the law. This status previously had been an exclusive privilege of the Catholic Church.

While the constitution specifies that there is no state church and provides for freedom of religion and belief, the government signed a concordat in 1954 with the Vatican, which designated Catholicism as the official religion and extended special privileges to the Catholic Church not granted to other religious groups. These included the legal recognition of church law; use of public funds to underwrite some church expenses, such as rehabilitation of church facilities; and a complete exoneration from customs duties. In 2008 the government informed the Catholic Church that it would assume most of the cost of building a new cathedral and religious sanctuary complex in Bayaguana, but after obtaining the site, it suspended construction due to lack of funds.

Religious groups are required to register with the government. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church may request exoneration from customs duties from the Office of the Presidency. The process can be lengthy; however, no requests for customs exoneration were denied during the reporting period.

The law requires that the Bible be read in public schools, but it was not enforced. Private schools are exempt from this requirement.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Our Lady of Altagracia Day, Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Our Lady of Mercedes Day, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Representatives of the U.S. embassy met with leaders of various religious communities, including those of minority groups.

[Back to Top](#)

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