



Brazil

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 3,286,488 square miles and a population of 188,078,200. Nearly all major religious groups are present. Many citizens worship in more than one church or participate in the rituals of more than one religion. The 2000 census taken by the Geographic and Statistical Institute of Brazil (IBGE) indicated that approximately 74 percent of the population identified themselves as Roman Catholic, although only a small percentage regularly attended Mass. Approximately 15 percent of the population was Protestant, an estimated 85 percent of whom were Pentecostal or evangelical. These groups included the Assemblies of God, Christian Congregation of Brazil, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, the Quadrangular Gospel, God is Love, Maranata, Brazil for Christ, House of the Blessing, New Life, and others. Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, Congregationalists, and others accounted for most of the remaining Protestants and were centered in the south. In the 2000 census, 199,645 residents identified themselves as belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), but the church listed its current membership as 970,903.

According to the 2000 census, there were approximately 214,873 adherents of Buddhism and 151,080 adherents of other oriental religious groups. The Japanese-Brazilian community practiced Shintoism to a limited degree. There are 17,088 adherents of indigenous traditions, and 2,905 Hindus.

Followers of African and syncretic religious groups such as Candomble totaled 127,582, while followers of Umbanda totaled 397,431. There were no statistics on the number of followers of Xango or of Macumba; however, data from the same study indicated that followers of Afro-Brazilian religious groups totaled 0.3 percent of the population.

Followers of spiritism, mainly Kardecists-adherents of the doctrine expounded by Frenchman Allan Kardec in the 19th century-constituted approximately 1.3 percent, with 2,262,401 followers. There were 25,889 practitioners of Spiritualism. An estimated 7 percent did not practice any religion, and approximately 384,000 participants did not respond to the census.

Reliable figures on the number of Muslims do not exist. Muslim leaders estimated that there were between 700,000 and 3 million Muslims, with the lower figure representing those who actively practiced their religion, while the higher estimate included also nominal members. These figures are much higher than the 27,239 Muslims reported in the 2000 census. There are significant Muslim communities in São Paulo, the ABC industrial suburbs of the greater São Paulo city area, and in the Santos area. There are also communities in Parana state in the coastal region and in Curitiba and Foz do Iguazu in the triborder area. The community is overwhelmingly Sunni; the recent Shiite immigrants gravitate to small insular communities in São Paulo, Curitiba, and Foz do Iguazu, whereas the Sunnis are for the most part completely assimilated into broader society. Sunni and Shi'a Islam are practiced predominantly by immigrants from Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt who arrived during the past 25 years. Conversions to Islam have increased recently among non-Arab citizens. There are approximately 52 mosques, Islamic religious centers, and Islamic associations.

According to the Jewish Confederation of Brazil (CONIB), there are 119,560 Jewish persons of whom 60,000 are in São Paulo state and 40,000 in Rio de Janeiro state. Many other cities have smaller Jewish communities.

Foreign missionary groups are present.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There are no registration requirements for religious groups. There is no favored or state religion, although the Government has a concordat with the Vatican. All religious denominations are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize. There is a general provision for access to religious services and counsel in all civil and military establishments. The law prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The following holy days are observed as national or regional holidays: Saint Sebastian's Day, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Saint John's Day, Our Lady of Carmen ("Carmo"), Assumption Day, Our Lady Aparecida, All Souls' Day, Evangelicals Day, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

Public schools are required to offer religious instruction, but neither the Constitution nor legislation defines how this should be done. Religious instruction is optional for students. Each school defines how to offer religious instruction and in which religion, usually in agreement with parent councils. Education is mandatory for all children, but parents are free to send their children to the public or private school of their choice.

The Government restricted the access of nonindigenous persons, including missionaries, to indigenous reserves and required visitors to seek permission from the National Indian Foundation to enter official indigenous areas.

It is illegal to write, edit, publish, or sell books that promote anti-Semitism or racism. The law enables courts to fine or imprison anyone who displays, distributes, or broadcasts anti-Semitic or racist material and mandates a 2 to 5-year prison term for violators.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism was rare; however, there were reports of increasing violence against Jewish persons. Leaders in the Jewish community expressed concern over the continued appearance of anti-Semitic material on Internet websites compiled by neo-Nazi and "skinhead" groups. There were reports of anti-Semitic graffiti, harassment, vandalism, and threats via telephone and e-mail. The Government officially equates anti-Semitism to racism.

In May 2007 more than 100 instances of graffiti being painted on the wall of the Shalom Synagogue, on numerous Jewish residences, and throughout Teresópolis (35 miles from Rio de Janeiro), a city with a substantial Jewish presence, occurred. According to the president of the Rio de Janeiro Israelite Federation, it was unclear if the graffiti were anti-Semitic. However, according to the Coordination Forum for Countering Anti-Semitism, many had a swastika in addition to a cryptic symbol of an "88" superimposed over an "HH." In 2004 similar incidents occurred.

On August 5, 2006, six men threw Molotov cocktails and rocks at the Beth Jacob Synagogue in Campinas, breaking

windows, burning its main door, and painting an anti-Semitic slogan on the sidewalk in front of the temple.

Media reported that a São Paulo Jewish community leader received death threats in late July 2006, probably related to the July-August conflict involving Hezbollah and Israel. Police provided him with personal protection.

In 2005 15 persons were arrested and charged with attempted murder, gang formation, and racism for attacking 3 Jewish students in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul State. After spending more than 100 days in jail, all 15 were freed and awaiting the testimony stage of the process, which started in May 2006. At the end of the reporting period, no trial had been scheduled.

Numerous anti-Semitic websites continued to operate, one of which is on a server located in the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

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

There was no national ecumenical movement; however, the National Commission for Religious Dialogue brought together Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

Released on September 14, 2007

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