



Brazil

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

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 3,287,673 square miles and a population of approximately 186 million. Nearly all major religions and religious organizations were present in the country. Many citizens worshipped in more than one church or participated in the rituals of more than one religion. The 2000 census 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. Denominations included the Assemblies of God, Christian Congregation of Brazil, and Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Baptists accounted for most of the remaining Protestants and were centered in the south. There were approximately 427,000 adherents of "Buddhism and other oriental religions."

Shintoism was practiced to a limited degree in the Japanese-Brazilian community. There were 27,239 Muslims (which probably undercounts the actual total), 39,840 practitioners of Spiritualism, 10,723 adherents of indigenous traditions, and 2,979 Hindus. Followers of African and syncretic religions such as Candomble, Xango, Macumba, and Umbanda constituted an estimated 0.4 percent of the population. Followers of spiritism, mainly Kardecists--adherents of the doctrine expounded by Frenchman Allan Kardec in the nineteenth century--constituted approximately 1.3 percent, with 2,337,432 followers. An estimated 7 percent did not practice any religion, and approximately 384,000 participants did not respond to the census.

Leaders of the Muslim community estimated that there were between 700,000 and three million Muslims, with the lower figure representing those who actively practiced their religion, while the higher estimate would include also nominal members. These figures were much higher than the 27,239 Muslims reported in the 2000 census. Muslim leaders have never taken a formal count of the number of Muslims; however, they believed that the official census greatly underestimated the size of their community. Sunni and Shi'a Islam are practiced predominantly by immigrants from Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt who arrived during the past twenty-five years. A recent trend has been the increase in conversions to Islam among non-Arab citizens. There were approximately fifty-five mosques and Muslim religious centers.

Approximately 101,062 citizens identified themselves as Jewish. There were an estimated 35,000 Jews in Rio de Janeiro and 29,000 in Sao Paulo. Many other cities had smaller Jewish communities.

Foreign missionary groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and several evangelical organizations, operated freely throughout the country. The Institute for Religious Studies indicated there were 2,981 foreign Protestant missionaries and approximately 3,000 foreign Catholic priests in the country.

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 religions or religious groups. There is no favored or state religion, although the Government maintains 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 religious 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 is to define how to offer religious instruction and in which religion. This is usually done in agreement with parent councils. Education is mandatory for all children, so they must attend either a private or a public school, but parents are free to send their children to the school of their choice.

The Government restricts the access of nonindigenous persons, including missionaries, to indigenous reserves and requires 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 paraphernalia and mandates a two to five-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.

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.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. There was no national ecumenical movement; however, the National Commission for Religious Dialogue brought together Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders.

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

In May 2005 four "skinheads" were arrested and charged with attempted murder, gang formation, and racism for attacking three Jewish students in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul State. During the investigations, the police identified a second group, with fascist orientation, that participated in the attacks. By the end of the period covered by this report, an additional ten persons had been arrested and charged with attempted homicide and gang formation; one person under the age of seventeen also was arrested. After spending more than one hundred days in jail, all fifteen were freed and awaiting the testimony stage of the process, which started in May 2006.

No further information was available on the 2004 incident in which anti-Semitic graffiti was found in a bathroom at Pontificia Universidade Catolica in Rio de Janeiro State (PUC-RJ); six students were under police investigation. PUC-RJ had approximately ten thousand students, 5 percent of whom were Jewish.

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 15, 2006

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](#)