

BURKINA FASO 2015 International Religious Freedom Report

Executive Summary

The constitution states the country is a secular state, and both it and other laws provide for the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to practice the religion of their choice. Unlike previous years, the transition government did not subsidize travel costs for Muslim pilgrims going on the Hajj, but allocated subsidies to the three main religious communities. The government created a National Observatory of Religious Facts (ONAFAR) to “monitor the implementation of regulations on cultural practices” and promote tolerance and interfaith dialogue.

In March incidents between members of the Tijaniyah Muslim community and the broader Sunni Muslim community over the right of Sunnis to pray in Ouaregou resulted in several injuries and property damage in the village.

To promote interfaith tolerance and dialogue, the U.S. embassy sponsored the visit of a Muslim cleric to the United States. Embassy officers also met with religious leaders to promote religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 18.9 million (July 2015 estimate). According to the 2006 census, 61 percent of the population is Muslim, predominantly Sunni, 19 percent is Roman Catholic, 4 percent belong to various Protestant groups, and 15 percent maintain exclusively indigenous beliefs. Less than 1 percent is atheist or belongs to other religious groups. Statistics on religious affiliation are approximate because Muslims and Christians often adhere simultaneously to some aspects of indigenous religious beliefs.

Muslims reside largely in the northern, eastern, and western border regions, and Christians are concentrated in the center of the country. Indigenous religious beliefs are practiced throughout the country, especially in rural communities. The capital has a mixed Muslim and Christian population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

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The constitution states the country is secular, and both it and other laws provide for the right of individuals to choose and change their religion and to practice the religion of their choice. The constitution states freedom of belief is subject to respect for law, public order, good morals, and “the human person.” Political parties based on religion, ethnicity, or regional affiliation are forbidden.

The law requires all organizations, religious or otherwise, to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization. The registration process usually takes about three to four weeks and costs less than 50,000 CFA francs (\$83). Registration confers legal status but no specific obligations or benefits. Failure to register may result in a fine of 50,000 to 150,000 CFA francs (\$83 to \$249).

Religious groups operate under the same regulatory framework for publishing and broadcasting as other entities. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization has the right to request copies of proposed publications and broadcasts to verify that they are in accordance with the nature of the religious group as stated in their registration.

Religious teaching is not allowed in public schools. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operate private primary and secondary schools and some schools of higher education. By law schools (religious or otherwise) must submit the names of their directors to the government and register their schools with the Ministry of National Education and Literacy, but the government does not appoint or approve these officials.

Government Practices

In January the government established a National Observatory of Religious Facts (ONAFAR) to “monitor the implementation of regulations on cultural practices,” as previously proposed by officials from religious communities and the government. The ONAFAR monitored religious media content and the implementation of regulations on cultural practices, promoted tolerance and interreligious dialogue, and strengthened the capacities of religious groups. The ONAFAR had 10 members representing the Superior Council for Communication, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, the Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions, the Federation of Islamic Associations, and the (Catholic) Burkina-Niger Episcopal Conference.

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The government gave all religious groups equal access to registration and routinely approved their applications.

The government did not fund religious schools or require them to pay taxes unless they conducted for-profit activities. Likewise, the government taxed religious groups only if they engaged in commercial activities, such as farming or dairy production. The government reviewed the curricula of most religious schools to ensure they offered the full standard academic curriculum; however, the majority of Quranic schools were not registered, and thus their curricula were not reviewed.

The government allocated 75 million CFA francs (\$124,400) each to various Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant communities. According to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, the government might provide an additional subsidy when the religious community or organization pursued a mission of general interest, such as education, health, or vocational training; when the religious community conducted an activity of national interest, such as promoting peace or social stability; or when the success or failure of an activity could have affected a significant part of the population, as in the case of religious pilgrimages. For example, in September the government inaugurated a new 1 billion CFA franc (\$1.65 million) terminal for pilgrims of all faiths at the Ouagadougou airport. The government also provided funding to Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim (commonly referred to as “Franco-Arabic”) schools through subsidies for teacher salaries, which were typically less than those of public school teachers.

In the wake of the 2014 resignation of former President Blaise Compaore, representatives of these three religious communities were included in discussions with the military, political parties, and civil society organizations to create a charter for the country’s transitional government. Representatives of religious groups were included in the transitional government as members of a “college” formed to select the president of the transitional government.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In March violent clashes within the Muslim community between members of the Tijaniyah and broader Sunni movements in Ouaregou, Boulgou Province, led to several injuries and damage to private property. Local authorities told journalists that the incidents started after the arrival in Ouaregou of a group of migrants adhering to a different form of Sunni Islam. The Tijaniyah community, which was

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already present, prevented them from praying separately and attacked them when they did so. Local authorities, including the prefect, the gendarmerie, and the police, attempted an unsuccessful mediation. The Tenkodogo High Court indicted nine individuals for offenses related to the clashes and kept them in detention.

In January Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant clerics in Bobo-Dioulasso protested cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in the French publication *Charlie Hebdo*.

Members of the Burkinabe Muslim Community organization, the Catholic Archdiocese of Ouagadougou, and the (Protestant) Federation of Evangelical Churches stated that religious tolerance was widespread and that numerous examples existed of families of mixed faiths.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials met separately with Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant religious leaders throughout the country, at the local and national levels, to encourage their efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and advocate for religious tolerance and freedom.

In July the embassy sponsored a young member of the Muslim community to visit the United States through a U.S. government program on tolerance and interfaith dialogue.