

PERU 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution bars discrimination based on religious affiliation or belief and provides for freedom of conscience and religion, either individually or in association with others. It provides for the separation of religion and state but also recognizes the historic importance of the Roman Catholic Church.

Former President Pedro Castillo attempted to unconstitutionally dissolve Congress and rule by supreme decree on December 7. Congress subsequently impeached him, and at-times violent antigovernment protests followed through the end of the year. The Interreligious Council of Peru played a mediation role in efforts to de-escalate the violence. During the year, the government registered 174 non-Catholic religious groups, compared with 166 in 2021. In January, then President Castillo and his Prime Minister, Anibal Torres, met with the Interreligious Council of Peru leadership to discuss “promoting respect, tolerance, and dialogue among different faith traditions.” The meeting followed a December 2021 presentation of a Ministry of Justice and Human Rights (MOJ) report that reviewed the landscape of religious expression in the decade since the 2011 religious freedom law entered into force. Castillo said he would follow up on the Interreligious Council’s recommendations, which included the creation of public policy on religious freedom under a formal agreement between the council and the MOJ, the designation of a National Religious Freedom Day, and the inclusion of an interreligious prayer service on national holidays and at official government celebrations. The Interreligious Council of Peru continued to engage the MOJ to promote religious freedom principles, such as equal access to government benefits for all religious groups and the opportunity to serve as military chaplains, benefits for which the Catholic Church automatically qualifies but for which other religious groups must apply. There were no reports of the Castillo government following up as promised on the Interreligious Council’s recommendations before Castillo’s impeachment in December.

The Interreligious Council of Peru organized the second interreligious prayer ceremony during the commemoration of the country’s Independence Day on July 28, which then President Castillo attended with government ministers.

U.S. embassy officials continued to engage MOJ representatives to emphasize the importance of religious liberty and issues related to public health, education, taxation, and military chaplains. Embassy officials also engaged representatives of the Interreligious Council of Peru and its subcouncil, the Interreligious Council for Refugees and Migrants (CIREMI), as well as the Catholic Church and the Islamic Association, to discuss their efforts to promote tolerance and interreligious dialogue, including through assistance to migrants and refugees.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 32.3 million (midyear 2022). The 2017 national census reported the population as 76 percent Catholic (81 percent in 2007); 14 percent Protestant (mainly evangelical Protestant, 13 percent in 2007); 5.1 percent nonreligious (2.9 percent in 2007); and 4.9 percent other religious groups (3.3 percent in 2007). Other religious groups include Israelites of the New Universal Pact (an evangelical Christian group that blends biblical and Andean religious beliefs, with an emphasis on communal farming life), Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), Jews, Muslims, Baha'is, Buddhists, Orthodox Christians, and the International Society of Krishna Consciousness.

According to the World Jewish Congress, approximately 3,000 Jews reside in the country, primarily in Lima, Cusco, and Iquitos. According to the Islamic Association of Peru, there are approximately 2,600 Muslims living in the country – 2,000 in Lima and 600 in the Tacna region. Lima's Muslim community is approximately half Arab in origin and half local converts, while Tacna's Muslim community is mostly Pakistani in origin. Most Muslims are Sunni.

Some individuals in the Andes and the Amazon practice traditional Indigenous faiths. Many citizens practice a syncretic faith that blends Catholicism and pre-Columbian beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution bars discrimination and persecution based on religious affiliation or belief and provides for freedom of religion, either individually or in association with others. It states every person has the right to privacy of religious conviction. It establishes the separation of religion and state but recognizes the Catholic Church's role as "an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral foundation" of the country.

An agreement (concordat) between the government and the Holy See confers the Catholic Church certain institutional privileges in education, taxation, and immigration of religious workers. A religious freedom law exempts Catholic Church buildings, houses, and other real estate holdings from property taxes. Other religious groups often must pay property taxes on their schools and clerical residences, depending on the municipal jurisdiction and whether the group seeks and/or receives tax-exempt status as a nonprofit organization. The law exempts Catholic religious workers from taxes on international travel. The government also exempts all work-related earnings of Catholic priests and bishops from income taxes. By law, the military may employ only Catholic clergy as chaplains.

The MOJ is responsible for engaging with religious groups, through the Office of Catholic Church Affairs, or the Office of Interconfessional Affairs for all other religious groups.

Registration with the MOJ is optional and voluntary. The stated purpose of the registry is to promote a religious group's integrity and to facilitate a productive relationship with the government. There is no minimum number of members required for a religious entity to register. Religious groups do not have to register to obtain institutional benefits, but registration grants them legal-person status (as a business or nongovernmental organization) and allows them to engage directly with the government in that capacity, facilitating communication and potential requests for institutional benefits. Government regulations allow all religious groups, registered or not, to apply for tax exemptions and worker or resident visas directly with the pertinent government institutions. Registration is free, the process usually takes one week, and the MOJ helps in completing the application forms.

By law, all prisoners, regardless of their religious affiliation, may practice their religion and seek the ministry of someone of the same faith.

The Ministry of Education mandates all schools, public and private, to provide a course on religion through the primary and secondary levels, but the 2011 Religious Freedom Law specifies that schools provide such a course “without violating the freedom of conscience of the student, parents, or teachers.” Public schools teach Catholicism in religion class, and the Ministry of Education requires the presiding Catholic bishop of an area to approve the public schools’ religious education teachers. Parents may request an exemption for their children from mandatory religion classes. The government may also grant exemptions from the religious education requirement to secular and non-Catholic private schools. Non-Catholic children attending public schools are also exempt from classes on Catholicism. The law states schools may not academically disadvantage students seeking exemptions from Catholic education classes.

According to an unimplemented 2018 Constitutional Court ruling, government financing for schools operated by religious groups is unconstitutional because it is “incompatible with the principle of secularism.” The ruling provided the state must suspend funding for these schools within a reasonable period or establish a general and secular system of subsidies for all private educational institutions regardless of their religious affiliation.

The law requires all employers to accommodate religious days and holidays of all employees; this accommodation includes allowing an employee to use annual vacation leave for this purpose.

Foreign religious workers must apply for a visa through the National Superintendency for Migration (SNM) of the Ministry of Interior. If the religious group registers with the MOJ, the SNM accepts this as proof the applicant group is a religious organization. If the group does not register with the MOJ, the SNM makes its decision on a case-by-case basis.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Former President Pedro Castillo attempted to unconstitutionally dissolve Congress and rule by supreme decree on December 7. Congress subsequently impeached him, and at-times violent antigovernment protests followed through

the end of the year. The Interreligious Council of Peru, whose members include the Catholic Church, Islamic Association of Peru, Jewish Association of Peru, Baha'i Community of Peru, Brahma Kumaris of Peru, Methodist Church of Peru, and Union of Evangelical Churches of Peru, among others, played a mediation role in efforts to deescalate violence following Castillo's impeachment. On December 18, the Peruvian Bishops' Council invited "all the faithful and people of good will to express peace, hope and fraternity in Peru" through a Day of Prayer for Peace. On December 22, representatives of 16 religious and faith communities issued a joint Interreligious Council declaration calling for "peace, tranquility, to unity and reconciliation based on a broad process of listening and national dialogue."

During the year, the government registered 174 non-Catholic groups, compared with 166 in 2021. Among the newly registered groups were the Life World Mission Church, the Korean-Peruvian Missionary Association, the First Baptist Church of Arequipa, and the Kairos Association of Transcultural Training. According to the MOJ and local interfaith groups, the government accepted and approved applications from all interested religious groups, with no reported denials.

According to the MOJ's Office of Catholic Affairs, the government provided an annual grant of approximately 2.6 million soles (\$687,000) to the Catholic Church for stipends to Archbishops and pastors, in accordance with the concordat with the Holy See. Each of the 45 Catholic ecclesiastical jurisdictions in the country also received a monthly subsidy of 1,000 soles (\$260) for maintenance and repairs of church buildings, some of them of significant historical and cultural value. Some Catholic clergy and laypersons employed by the church received subsidies from the government, in addition to these funds. These individuals represented approximately 8 percent of the Catholic clergy and pastoral agents. According to Catholic Church representatives, the church used these and other church funds to provide humanitarian services to the poor, regardless of their religious affiliation or non-affiliation. The government did not make available similar stipends to other religious groups.

In 2018, the Constitutional Court ruled that government financing for schools operated by religious groups was unconstitutional and "must establish a general and secular system of subsidies for all private educational institutions" regardless of their religious affiliation. Government officials said the government took no

action to implement the court's ruling. According to them, changes in personnel at various ministries during the year impeded progress and implementation on many fronts, including at the Ministry of Education, which had responsibility for addressing the issue of subsidies.

The Interreligious Council of Peru continued to engage the MOJ to promote religious freedom principles, such as equal access to government benefits for all religious groups, including tax exemptions on income, imports, property, and sales; visas for religious workers, and the opportunity to serve as military chaplains, all benefits for which the Catholic Church automatically qualifies but for which other religious groups must apply.

Protestant pastors again said some non-Catholic soldiers had difficulty finding and attending non-Catholic religious services because by law, only Catholic chaplains may serve in the military.

In January, then President Castillo and then Prime Minister Torres hosted representatives of the Interreligious Council of Peru, who provided their recommendations to protect religious freedoms. During the meeting, Guillermo Esdrugo Nery, director of communications for the Church of Jesus Christ and vice president of the council, said that he discussed with the President and Prime Minister the importance of defending freedom of conscience and religion in the country. In the meeting, Nery also highlighted the cultural contributions of religious groups in the country and their recent work to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Castillo said the government would follow up on the council's recommendations, which included the creation of public policy on religious freedom under a formal agreement between the council and the MOJ, the designation of a national Religious Freedom Day, and holding an interreligious prayer service on national holidays and at official government celebrations. As of his dismissal from office on December 7, Castillo had not acted on these issues.

In February, MOJ Director of Interconfessional Affairs María Esperanza Adrianzén joined Interreligious Council representatives and the Church of Jesus Christ communication director for the Andean region to reaffirm the importance of the right to practice religious or spiritual beliefs according to one's own conscience and to discuss the Organization of American States Inter-American Convention against Discrimination and Intolerance. In July, Vice Minister of Justice Jimmy

Quispe participated in a MOJ-hosted discussion on religious freedom in the country in a historical context, in which panelists compared the Peruvian experience with that of Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Spain.

Also in February, the MOJ organized a public ceremony to commemorate the December release of its *Report on Religious Freedom 2011-2021*, which examines the historic evolution of religion in society and culture since the country's independence in 1821, its relationship with the state, and the impact of the religious freedom law. The report ratified the country's commitment to continue advancing religious freedom under the principles of "democracy, equality, and human rights." It reaffirmed the secular, neutral mandate of the state while reiterating its cooperation with all religious organizations to advance social wellbeing. According to the report, formal government engagement with and inclusion of non-Catholic religious organizations became formalized with the 2003 creation of the Directorate of Inter-Confessional Affairs and its Registry of Religious Entities, which granted non-Catholic religions government recognition for the first time. Since 2003, through the report's publication, 167 organizations gained recognition, including 157 non-Catholic Christian organizations, six "eastern" religious organizations, three Jewish organizations, and one Muslim organization.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The Interreligious Council of Peru continued its stated goal of "promoting just and harmonious societies within a framework of respect, tolerance, and dialogue between different faith traditions." The council held a "Let us Pray for Peru" event on July 25 as part of the country's celebrations marking the July 28 Independence Day. Castillo attended alongside eight former ministers. The ceremony's theme focused on COVID-19 victims and vulnerable populations.

Religious groups and interfaith organizations continued to coordinate with the government, civil society, and international organizations to provide humanitarian assistance, regardless of religious affiliation, to an estimated 1.5 million displaced Venezuelans who entered the country since 2017. The Catholic Church and various evangelical Protestant churches in Tumbes, located in the northwestern area of the country, continued to work with the government, the International Organization for Migration, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for

Refugees to provide temporary housing to Venezuelan migrants at the northern border.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

During the year, U.S. embassy officials met with government officials to reiterate the U.S. government's prioritization of religious freedom. In February, embassy officials attended the MOJ's presentation of its Report on Religious Freedom 2011-2021 and expressed continued U.S. government support for religious freedom in the country. Embassy representatives also raised with government officials the importance of having equitable tax and education policies applicable to all religious groups and expanding the military chaplaincy to include non-Catholics.

Embassy officials engaged representatives of the Interreligious Council of Peru, as well as the Catholic Church, the Islamic Association, and members of CIREMI, to discuss their efforts to promote tolerance and interreligious dialogue, including through assistance to migrants and refugees, a shared priority. During the year, the embassy issued 51 tweets, two statements via social media, and four press releases to promote human rights and inclusion, including messages supporting respect for diversity and freedom of religion.