

Comoros

The archipelago island nation of Comoros lies off the east coast of Africa has a population of around 800,000, making it one of the lowest populated but most densely populated countries. Around 99% of the population are identified as Sunni Muslims. Following a referendum in 2009, the government introduced a law declaring Islam the state religion and entrenching Islamist tendencies. Comoros is member of the League of Arab States (LAS), as well as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Constitution and government	Education and children's rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
			<p><u>It is illegal to advocate secularism or church-state separation, or such advocacy is suppressed</u> <u>It is illegal or unrecognised to identify as an atheist or as non-religious</u></p>
<p><u>The non-religious are barred from some government offices (including posts reserved for particular religions or sects)</u> <u>State legislation is partly derived from religious law or by religious authorities</u></p>	<p><u>Religious or ideological instruction is mandatory in all or most state-funded schools with no secular or humanist alternative</u></p>	<p><u>Systemic religious privilege results in significant social discrimination</u> <u>Religious control over family law or legislation on moral matters</u> <u>It is made difficult to register or operate an explicitly Humanist, atheist, secularist or other non-religious NGO or other human rights organization</u></p>	<p><u>'Apostasy' is outlawed and punishable with a prison sentence</u> <u>'Blasphemy' is outlawed or criticism of religion is restricted and punishable with a prison sentence</u></p>
	<p><u>There is state funding of at least some religious schools</u></p>	<p><u>Some religious courts rule in civil or family matters on a coercive or discriminatory basis</u></p>	
		<p><u>Religious courts or tribunals rule directly on some family or 'moral' matters; it is legally an opt-in system, but the possibility of social coercion is very clear</u></p>	

Constitution and government

The constitution nominally protects freedom of thought, religion or belief, but in practice other laws and practices severely restrict this right. Article 1 of the constitution as revised in 2009 declares Islam the state religion and commits the Comorian people “to draw from Islam, the religion of the state, the permanent inspiration of the principles and rules that govern the Union”.

<constituteproject.org/constitution/Comoros_2009.pdf>

The grand mufti is nominated by the president and is mandated to “counsel” government and the public on religious matters, being attached to government departments including the Ministry of Justice, Public Service, Administrative Reforms, Human Rights, and Islamic Affairs.

Education and children’s rights

There are no specific legal requirements around teaching the Qu’ran in school but a large majority of students learn Arabic and this is often mixed with Qu’ranic teaching.

In fact, an Islamic school system operates across across the country, with children expected to attend Qu’ranic schools for two or three years. Children are instructed in Islamic tenets and learn some Arabic.

<studycountry.com/guide/KM-education.htm>

Family, community and society

The grand mufti is provided a public platform, regularly addressing the country on radio, offering conservative Islamic views on a range of social topics. The government does not explicitly enforce restrictions on alcohol consumption nor modest dress, however societal pressures, especially at village level, are known to enforce these sorts of restrictions.

Witchcraft

The penal code (Article 232) criminalizes “practices of witchcraft, magic or charlatanism” that disturb public order or harm persons or property. These crimes of magic are punishable by fine or imprisonment from two months to two years.

<perma.cc/K2W9-QCEQ>

Freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values

Apostasy and enforced identity

Apostasy (from Islam) is a criminal offence in Comoros. As well as this there is serious negative social discrimination against ‘apostates’. A law student, Musa Kim, who reportedly converted from Islam to Christianity in 2008, was beaten by his family. He was rescued and recovered in a secret location. That house was later identified and was razed. Kim survived but would not report any of the incidents to the police for fear that this would cause more trouble for him.

<worthynews.com/3101-comoros-christians-oppressed-on-indian-ocean-islands>

Strongly deterred from leaving Islam, citizens are also forced to conform to at least some Islamic practices. Under the penal code:

“Article 229-7. Any Muslim who has apparently consumed knowingly products prohibited by

Islamic law will be punished by imprisonment of one to six months and a fine of 15,000 to 200,000 francs."

[<perma.cc/K2W9-QCEQ>](http://perma.cc/K2W9-QCEQ)

Though there are some Christians, in particular Roman Catholics from France living in Comoros, anyone with nationality cannot practice a faith other than Islam. The demographics of Comoros are officially roughly 99% Sunni Muslim. Visitors and expatriates may practice other religions (but must not proselytise or display their faith publicly).

Proselytising of any religion other than Sunni Shafi'i Islam is prohibited in law (see below). While foreign visitors and expatriates can practice their religion, they must do so in private. It was reported in 2006 that a Christian missionary who was having prayer meetings in his home, had his house raided and 4 men were detained for 3 months.

[<worthynews.com/970-comoros-detains-christians-amid-concerns-over-persecution>](http://worthynews.com/970-comoros-detains-christians-amid-concerns-over-persecution)

Christians report being monitored on visits to the country and although the constitution claims religious freedom and the law do not technically prevent visitors practicing other faiths, many have claimed to feel that they cannot safely practice any other religion in Comoros. A Christian from Zanzibar reported the following anonymously to Worthy News:

"Comoros [is] a "horrificing environment for one to practice Christianity," adding that it was not long after his arrival to the main island that he realized he was being monitored. He cut short his trip early last month. "I planned to take three different taxis to the airport" to evade authorities, he said. "But thank God on that day I met a Catholic priest who gave me a lift together with some Tanzanian soldiers to the airport."

[<worthynews.com/3101-comoros-christians-oppressed-on-indian-ocean-islands>](http://worthynews.com/3101-comoros-christians-oppressed-on-indian-ocean-islands)

Contradicting Islam or "outraging" ministers of religion

While there is no explicit reference to 'blasphemy', under the heading of "Obstacles to the free exercise of worship", the Penal Code of the Comoros contains a provision which prevents the promotion of non-Islamic religious beliefs to Muslims, and another which outlaws "outraging" ministers of religion:

"Article 229-8. Whoever divulges, propagates, or teaches Muslims a religion other than the Muslim religion, shall be punished by imprisonment for three months and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 francs.

The same penalties apply for the sale, offering for sale, even free distribution to Muslims, of books, pamphlets, magazines, records and cassettes disclosing a religion other than Islam."

[<perma.cc/K2W9-QCEQ>](http://perma.cc/K2W9-QCEQ)

Though phrased only in terms of alternative specifically religious beliefs, it is probable that promotion of non-religious views or criticism of Islam could be defined as anti-Islamic proselytizing and therefore fall under this same provision.

The same section lays out punishments for desecrating or interrupting religious places or objects.

Article 231 of the penal code criminalizes "outraging" (or perhaps best translated as "insulting") a minister of religion "in the performance of his duties" punishable with a fine or imprisonment from six months up to two years, or from two years up to five years if that minister is "outraged" during while conducting "worship". The vague terms suggest that this law could be used as a quasi-

blasphemy law a cleric was confronted with criticism during the course of his work.

Freedom of the Press

While there is no specific restriction on press freedom most journalists will practice self-censorship in order to maintain their reputation and careers, and members of the government have been said to have “partially limited press freedom by publicly criticizing journalists who wrote controversial articles”.

<state.gov/documents/organization/204316.pdf>