

Armenia

The Republic of Armenia is a democratic sovereign state in western Asia with a population of approximately 3 million people. The Armenian Apostolic Church is widely recognised as the world’s oldest church, and is the country’s primary religious establishment with 93% of the population as adherents.

Constitution and government	Education and children’s rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
<u>There is systematic religious privilege</u> <u>State-funding of religious institutions or salaries, or discriminatory tax exemptions</u>	<u>Religious schools have powers to discriminate in admissions or employment</u> <u>Religious or ideological instruction is mandatory in at least some public schools (without secular or humanist alternatives)</u>	<u>Discriminatory prominence is given to religious bodies, traditions or leaders</u>	<u>Expression of core humanist principles on democracy, freedom or human rights is somewhat restricted</u>

Legend

Constitution and government

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the right to practise, choose, and change religious belief; however, some laws and policies restrict this freedom. The constitution and the law establish separation of church and state, but recognize “the exclusive mission of the Armenian Apostolic Church as a national church in the spiritual life, development of the national culture, and preservation of the national identity of the people of Armenia.”

Article 8.1 of the constitution explicitly outlines the secular nature of the state and affirming religious freedom, which writes “The church shall be separate from the state” and that “freedom of activities for all religious organizations in accordance with the law shall be guaranteed”. Within the same article, the constitution gives official prominence to the Armenian Apostolic Church and credits it with improving “spiritual life, development of the national culture and preservation of the national identity of the people of Armenia”.

The law prohibits but does not define “soul hunting,” a term describing forced conversion but also proselytisation in general. The prohibition applies to all religious groups, including the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Religious privileges

The law grants privileges to the Armenian Apostolic Church not available to other religious groups. For example, the church may have permanent representatives in hospitals, orphanages, boarding schools, military units, and places of detention, while other religious groups may have representatives in these places only upon request.

Education and children's rights

The law mandates that public education be secular. However, courses in the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church are part of the public school curriculum and are taught by public school teachers. The church has the right to participate in the development of the syllabus and textbooks for this course and to define the qualifications of its teachers. The church may also nominate candidates to teach the course. The class is mandatory; students are not permitted to opt out of the course, and no alternatives are available to students of other religions or no religion. Critics say the law focuses more on inculcating Church doctrine than on teaching the history of the Church. Public schools are required to display portraits of the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church alongside those of the president.

In 2012 there were media reports that 20 teachers had been allegedly fired from public schools for holding minority religious views. The Education Ministry claimed that the teachers had been proselytizing in schools. In December 2013, a court upheld the Ministry's refusal, on privacy grounds, to respond to an information request filed by a nongovernmental organization regarding these teachers.

In addition, the law grants the Armenian Apostolic Church the right to organize voluntary extracurricular religious classes in state educational institutions. Other religious groups may provide religious instruction to members only in their own facilities.

Freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values

There are limits on press freedom. The authorities use informal pressure to maintain control over broadcast outlets, the chief source of news for most Armenians. State-run Armenian Public Television is the only station with nationwide coverage, and the owners of most private channels have close government ties.

Conscientious objection

For the first time since 1993 there are no Armenian Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned for conscientious objection to military service. In 2013 changes to the alternative service law corrected long-standing problems which meant that most religious and social groups now accept the terms of alternative service.

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Minority Rights

LGBT people face discrimination, harassment, and physical violence. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not included in anti-discrimination or hate speech laws, which limits legal recourse for many crimes against LGBT people. Hate speech against LGBT people, including by public officials, remains a serious issue.

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