

France

In France, the dominant religion is Catholicism but the state is strongly secular. Freedom of religion is supported but its importance is secondary to the freedom and rights of all citizens and public order and morality. France suffered two horrendous terrorist attacks in 2015, first against the offices of satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and a Jewish supermarket in January, supposedly in response to the magazine “insulting Islam”; then coordinated attacks by ISIS against indiscriminate targets across Paris in November.

Constitution and government	Education and children’s rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
<u>Anomalous discrimination by local or provincial authorities, or overseas territories</u>			
	<u>No formal discrimination in education</u>	<u>No religious tribunals of concern, secular groups operate freely, individuals are not persecuted by the state</u>	<u>No fundamental restrictions on freedom of expression or advocacy of humanist values</u>

Legend

Constitution and government

The French constitution was adopted in 1958 and declares France a secular state and guarantees religious freedom and equality. Article 1 states, ‘France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic, guaranteeing that all citizens regardless of their origin, race or religion are treated as equals before the law and respecting all religious beliefs.’

The constitution and other laws, including the 1905 “Law on the Separation of the Churches and the State”, ensure state secularism (laïcité) and protect freedom of religion or belief. The constitution also guarantees the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and the government respects these rights in practice. The establishment of secularism in the public sphere put all religions into the private sphere. The government does not have a religious preference and aims at the peaceful co-existence of various faiths.

<france.fr/en/institutions-and-values/secularism-and-religious-freedom.html>

Local exceptions

There are some exceptions to the policy of strict secularism. Notably, the law of 1905 does not completely apply to all French regions and territories. Because the regions of Alsace and Lorraine were part of the German Empire during the passage of the 1905 law, members of Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Jewish groups there may choose to allocate a portion of their income tax to their religious group. Local governments may also provide financial support for building religious edifices.

In addition, there are still blasphemy laws on the book in the regions of Alsace and Lorraine, as Articles 166 and 167 of the local penal code, although no convictions have been registered.

French Guyana, which is governed under the colonial laws of Charles X, may provide subsidies to the Catholic Church. The French Overseas Departments and Territories, which include island territories in the Atlantic, Caribbean, Pacific, and Indian oceans, are also not subject to the 1905 law and may provide funding for religious groups within their territories.

The French government maintains all the Roman Catholic churches built before 1905, however they are under the ownership of the French government. No other religious buildings are maintained in this way.

Family, community and society

Some religious restrictions, not necessarily unlawful or wrong

France banned the wearing of the face-veil (niqab) in public, along with other face coverings, explained in terms of maintaining social cohesion and disempowering potential terrorists. In July 2014, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that it was within the margin of freedom under European human rights legislation. The French government has also prohibited or limited the activities of religious groups considered to be cults, such as Scientology and Jehovah's Witnesses.