

# Religious landscape of Brazil

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**Jean-Baptiste Debret** ("*Colonisation et Catholicisme au Brésil*") illustrates the arrival of Portuguese colonizers and Jesuit missionaries in Brazil.

# Diversity

Brazil is one of the most religiously diverse and vibrant countries in the world, shaped by Indigenous traditions, African spirituality, European Catholicism, and modern influences like Protestantism and secularism.

Brazil's religious landscape is **dynamic and pluralistic**, reflecting its history of colonization, slavery, immigration, and modernization. While Catholicism remains dominant, Protestantism and secularism are rising, and Afro-Brazilian religions continue to shape cultural identity. Religious tensions and syncretism coexist, making Brazil a fascinating case study in global religious diversity.



# Major Religious Groups

- **(A) Christianity (87-90% of Population)**
- **Roman Catholicism (50-55%) Declining**
  - Brazil has the **largest Catholic population in the world** (over 100 million).
  - Strong cultural influence from Portuguese colonization (1500–1822).
  - **Declining** due to growth of Protestantism and secularism.
- **Protestantism (30-35%) growing. Now a major political/social force.**
  - **Pentecostal/Evangelical** churches (Assembleia de Deus, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God) are rapidly **growing**.
  - **Mainline Protestant** (Lutheran, Baptist) communities exist, particularly in German/Italian-descended regions.
- **Other Christian Groups growing**
  - **Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Orthodox Christians** (small but growing).

# Afro-Brazilian Religions (2-5%)

- **Candomblé & Umbanda**
  - Blend of Yoruba (West African), Indigenous, and Catholic traditions.
  - Strong in Bahia, Rio de Janeiro.
  - Historically persecuted but now legally protected.
- **(C) Spiritism (3-5%)**
- Based on **Kardecist Spiritism** (Allan Kardec's teachings).
- Focus on reincarnation, mediumship, and moral evolution.
- **Popular among urban middle-class Brazilians.**
- **(D) Other Religions (1-3%)**
- **Buddhism, Islam, Judaism** (small but visible communities).
- **Indigenous religions** (still practiced in Amazon regions).
- **(E) Non-Religious (8-15%)**
- **Atheists, agnostics, and secular individuals** (rising trend, especially among youth).

# Historical Influences

- **Colonial Era (1500–1822):**
  - Forced conversion of Indigenous peoples and African slaves to Catholicism.
  - Syncretism between Catholicism and African/Indigenous beliefs (e.g., **Our Lady of Aparecida** as a national patroness).
- **19th–20th Century:**
  - Arrival of European immigrants (Protestants, Jews, Spiritists).
  - Growth of **Umbanda** (Afro-Brazilian religion blending Spiritism and African traditions).
- **Late 20th–21st Century:**
  - **Evangelical explosion** (Pentecostal churches gaining political influence).
  - **Decline of Catholicism** (from 90% in 1970 to ~50% today).

# Current Trends & Conflicts

- ✓ **Rise of Evangelical Protestantism** – Now a major political/social force.
- ✓ **Decline of Catholicism** – Due to secularization and Protestant competition.
- ✓ **Persisting Religious Intolerance** – Discrimination against Afro-Brazilian religions (Candomblé, Umbanda).
- ✓ **Growth of Non-Religious Population** – Especially in urban areas.

**Brazil's Orthodox Christian community** is **small but vibrant**, centered in **São Paulo, the South, and Rio de Janeiro**, with historical ties to European and Middle Eastern immigration.

While not a major religious force nationally, these communities maintain strong cultural and religious traditions.

# Orthodox Christians in Brazil: Demographics and Distribution

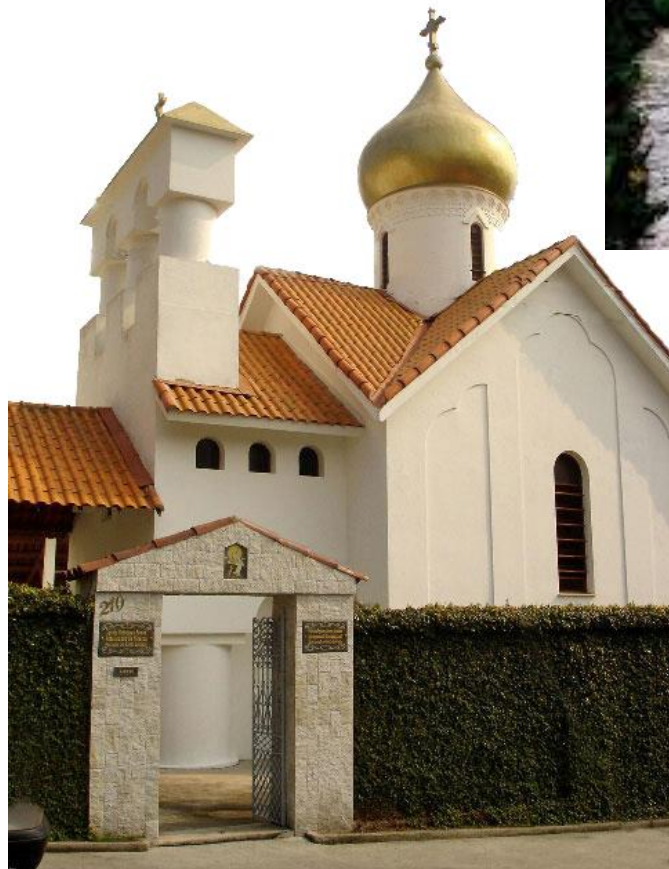
- **Estimated Population** *(Sources: World Christian Database, local Orthodox dioceses, and immigrant community estimates.)*
- **Total Orthodox Christians:** ~500,000 (0.2–0.3% of Brazil's population)
  - **Greek Orthodox:** ~150,000 (largest group)
  - **Russian/Slavic Orthodox:** ~50,000
  - **Syrian/Lebanese (Antiochian Orthodox):** ~50,000
  - **Other (Serbian, Armenian, Coptic, etc.):** ~250,000

# Orthodox communities in Brazil are mainly found in:

- **A) São Paulo (Largest Community)**
- **Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Buenos Aires & South America** (covers Brazil).
- **St. Nicholas Cathedral (Greek Orthodox)** in São Paulo.
- **Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCOR)** parishes.
- **Antiochian Orthodox** churches in Syrian-Lebanese neighborhoods (e.g., Bom Retiro district).
- **B) Rio de Janeiro**
- **St. Basil the Great Orthodox Church (Russian).**
- **St Zinaida Orthodox Church (Russian)**
- Small Greek and Antiochian parishes.
- **C) Southern Brazil (Paraná, Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul)**
- **Ukrainian and Russian descendants** in Curitiba, Porto Alegre, and Blumenau.
- **St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church (Ukrainian)** in Prudentópolis (a major center).
- **Some Russian Old Believer communities Staroveri** (descendants of 20th-century migrants).
- **D) Other Regions**
- **Belo Horizonte (MG):** Small Greek and Russian parishes.
- **Recife (PE):** Antiochian Orthodox presence.
- **Amazonas:** Some Russian Old Believer communities **Staroveri** (descendants of 20th-century migrants).

# Historical Background

- **Early 20th Century:** Orthodox immigrants arrived from **Greece, Russia, Ukraine, Syria, Lebanon, and Armenia** (fleeing wars, revolutions, or for economic opportunities).
- **Post-WWII:** More Russians and Eastern Europeans settled in Brazil.
- **Recent Growth:** Some converts through missionary work, but most Orthodox Christians remain ethnically tied.



# Major Orthodox Jurisdictions in Brazil

1. **Greek Orthodox Church (Ecumenical Patriarchate)** – Largest group.
2. **Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR)** – Strong in immigrant communities.
3. **Antiochian Orthodox Church** – Middle Eastern diaspora.
4. **Serbian, Ukrainian, and Armenian Apostolic Churches** – Smaller but active.

# Challenges & Trends

- **Limited growth** compared to Evangelical Christianity.
- **Ethnic vs. Convert Dynamics:** Most members are descendants of immigrants, though due to the growing attractivity more and more Brazilians convert.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Many churches serve as community centers for diaspora groups.