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## **Religious diversity and the public space: the public role of religion in Brazil**

Brazil is one of the most populous countries in the world. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, the country's population was almost 191 million people in 2010, and the estimated population by 2016 is 206 million. The population of Brazil comprises a great number of ethnic groups, and there exists a great degree of cultural and religious diversity. There is high level of religious adherence, as more than 90% of the population claim to be religious.

Religions have often been manifested in public spaces in Brazil, individually or in community with others. According to Silvio Ferrari (*Religion and the De-construction of the Public Space, 2015*), the public space has three dimensions. The first dimension is the common space, which is the physical space that people have to enter to meet their basic needs, and therefore is inescapable. Secondly, the political space is the space of debate where the public discourse takes shape. Finally, the institutional public space is the place for binding deliberations; it is a space in which compulsory decisions are made.

In Brazil, religion is freely expressed in the common and political spaces, as there are no major legal or government restrictions on the exercise of religion and belief. According to Pew Research Center's report (*Trends in Global Restrictions on Religion, 2016*), from 2007 to 2014 Brazil has been one of the countries with the lowest level of government restrictions on religious freedom among the 25 most populous countries in the world. Although there are debates on the limits of teaching about religion and proselitising, on religion and hate speech, and other relevant topics, the most controversial issues are related to the manifestation of religion in institutional public spaces.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss issues related the presence of religion in Brazilian institutional public spaces, focusing on the expression of religion in the National Congress. The issues covered include the display of the Crucifix on the wall of the Chamber of Deputies, the inclusion of the Bible on the Table of the Chamber of Deputies since the National Constituent Assembly of 1987-1988, the creation and performance of parliamentary groups oriented by a religion or belief, and the use of religious expressions in recent parliamentary debates regarding the impeachment of the President of Brazil.