

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of thought and religion, as well as the right to practice and change one's religion or belief. While its restrictions to address the COVID-19 pandemic were in effect, the government on occasion granted curfew exemptions to religious leaders to perform religious rites. Some members of the Rastafarian community said they objected to the government's requirement of vaccinations for all children attending public schools.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Embassy officials spoke with government officials, including from the Ministry of Social Transformation and Human Resource Development's Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs, and a member of the Rastafarian community to highlight the value of religious diversity in contributing to society and the importance of religious freedom as a fundamental human right. The embassy maintained frequent social media engagement on religious freedom issues. In January, a series of posts highlighted U.S. National Religious Freedom Day, and also included the history of religious freedom in the Eastern Caribbean.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 98,000 (midyear 2020 estimate). According to the 2011 census, 17.6 percent of the population is Anglican, 12.4 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 12.2 percent Pentecostal, 8.3 percent Moravian, 8.2 percent Roman Catholic, and 5.6 percent Methodist. Those with unspecified or no religious beliefs account for 5.5 percent and 5.9 percent of the population, respectively. Members of the Baptist Church, the Church of God, and the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium each account for less than 5 percent of the population. The census categorizes an additional 12.2 percent of the population as belonging to other religious groups, including Rastafarians, Muslims, Hindus, and Baha'is, without providing percentages for each group. Based on anecdotal information, these four religious groups are listed from largest to smallest.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of thought and religion, as well as the right to change and practice one's religion or belief. The constitution protects individuals from taking oaths contradictory to their beliefs or participating in events and activities of religions not their own, including participating in or receiving unwanted religious education. These rights may be limited in the interests of defense or public safety, order, morality, or health, or to protect the rights of others, unless actions under such limitations can be shown "not to be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society." The constitution prohibits members of the clergy from running for elected office. No law may be adopted that contradicts these constitutional provisions. The government does not enforce a law outlawing blasphemous language in a public place or any other place that would "cause annoyance to the public."

The government does not require religious groups to register; however, to receive tax- and duty-free concessions and to own, build, or renovate property, religious groups must register with the government. To register, religious groups must fill out an online tax form that describes the group's activities. The government uses this form to determine the group's tax status. The Inland Revenue Department reviews and approves the completed form, usually granting registration and tax concessions.

The law prohibits religious instruction in public schools. Private schools may provide religious instruction. Public schools require parents to immunize their children to attend school. Some private schools do not require immunizations for their students. The law also permits homeschooling.

The law decriminalizing marijuana for any use also recognizes the government's responsibility to uphold the religious rights of persons of the Hindu and Rastafarian faiths. It allows these persons to apply for a special religious license to cultivate the plant within their private dwelling, use the plant for religious purposes within their private dwelling or within their approved place of worship, and transport the plant between their private dwelling and approved place of worship. The special religious license, however, does not permit any commercial or financial transaction involving any part of the cannabis plant.

Occupational health regulations require individuals with dreadlocks to cover their hair when they work with food, hazardous equipment, or in the health sector. These regulations apply to both public and private sector workplaces.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

While its restrictions to address the COVID-19 pandemic were in effect, the government on occasion granted curfew exemptions to religious leaders to engage in religious activities.

Some members of the Rastafarian community said they objected to the government's requirement of vaccinations for all children attending public schools.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials spoke with the Ministry of Social Transformation and Human Resource Development's Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs to highlight the value of religious diversity in contributing to society and the importance of religious freedom as a fundamental human right.

Embassy officials also spoke with a representative of the Rastafarian community and emphasized the U.S. government's commitment to protecting religious freedom, including of minority religious groups.

The embassy maintained frequent social media engagement on religious freedom issues. In January, a series of posts highlighted U.S. National Religious Freedom Day, and also included the history of religious freedom in the Eastern Caribbean.