

MAURITIUS 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on creed and provides for the right of individuals to change, manifest, and propagate their religious beliefs. The government recognizes six groups as religions: Hindus, Roman Catholics, Muslims, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Seventh-day Adventists. Other religious groups must register as associations. As such they may obtain tax-exempt status but may not receive subsidies like the six recognized religions. The government failed to act during the year on the Assemblies of God request to be recognized as a religion rather than an association.

Police said low level tensions between Hindus and Muslims continued. The Council of Religions, a local organization composed of representatives from 18 religious groups, has traditionally hosted regular interfaith religious ceremonies and celebrations to foster mutual understanding and enhance interfaith collaboration among faith communities, but COVID-19 restrictions postponed most events.

U.S. embassy officers posted articles on social media that discussed religious freedom and engaged with religious organizations.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.4 million (midyear 2020 estimate). According to the 2011 census, approximately 48 percent of the population is Hindu, 26 percent Roman Catholic, 17 percent Muslim, and 6 percent non-Catholic Christian including Seventh-day Adventists, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, evangelical Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and members of the Assemblies of God. The latter state they are the second-largest Christian group after Catholics with approximately 50,000 members. The remaining 3 percent includes Buddhists, Baha'is, animists, and individuals who report no religious affiliation. More than 95 percent of Muslims are Sunni. There are approximately 100 Jews, according to the Jewish community president.

According to the 2011 census, the population of Port Louis is primarily Muslim and Catholic, while the remainder of the island's population is predominantly

Hindu. The island of Rodrigues, which contains approximately 3 percent of the country's population, is approximately 90 percent Catholic.

There is a strong correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity. Citizens of Indian ethnicity are primarily Hindu or Muslim. Those of Chinese ancestry generally practice Buddhism, Anglicanism, or Catholicism. Creoles (persons of African descent) and those of European descent are primarily Catholic.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on creed and provides for freedom of thought and religion, including the right of individuals to change, manifest, and propagate their religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance, alone or in community, in private or in public. These rights may be subject to limitations to protect public order, safety, morality, health, or the rights of others. The constitution also bars requiring oaths contrary to an individual's religious belief and bars compulsory religious education or attendance at religious ceremonies in schools. It gives religious groups the right to establish schools and provide religious instruction to members of that group. These schools are open to the general population as well. Citizens may file religious discrimination complaints with the Equal Opportunities Commission, which may open investigations if it determines a citizen's rights may have been infringed.

The constitution states that legislative candidates must identify themselves as belonging to one of the four national communities cited in the constitution: Hindu, Muslim, Sino-Mauritian, or general population.

A parliamentary decree recognizes the six main religious groups present prior to independence in 1968: Hindus, Catholics, Muslims, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Seventh-day Adventists. These groups receive annual lump sum payments from the finance ministry based on the number of members who identified as such during the last census. The registrar of associations registers other religious groups, which must have a minimum of seven members with designated leadership responsibilities. The finance ministry may grant these other groups tax-exempt privileges. Although registration of religious groups is required, the law does not prescribe penalties for unregistered groups.

Religious groups must obtain both residence and work permits for each foreign missionary. The Prime Minister's Office is the final authority on the issuance of these documents. The government grants residence permits to missionaries for a maximum of three years, with no extensions.

Religious education is allowed in public and private schools, at both the primary and secondary levels. The Catholic catechism is taught in all Catholic schools, and on demand in public schools, generally by lay members of the staff. Students may opt out. Catholic schools offer civic education classes for non-Catholic students. Nonreligious classes about Islam and Hinduism are offered in private and public high schools. Religious classes in those faiths take place outside the school system.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The government again did not take action to recognize the Assemblies of God as a religion. The denomination began petitioning the government for such recognition approximately 20 years ago, but as of year's end the government had not addressed the issue and the group was still considered an association. As a consequence, according to a pastor from the Assemblies of God, newborns could not be registered as Assemblies of God members and its pastors had limited access to hospitals and prisons.

Some Christians and Muslims continued to state the predominance of Hindus in the civil service favored Hindus in government recruitment and promotion, preventing Christians and Muslims from reaching higher level positions in the civil service. In general and dating back years, non-Hindus have stated they were underrepresented in government. There were no reliable statistics available on the number of members of different religious groups represented in the civil service. According to the Truth and Justice Commission's 2011 report, however, civil service employment did not represent national ethnoreligious diversity, and observers believed its conclusion remained valid.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Unlike previous years, there were no reports of places of worship being vandalized. However, police said low level tensions between Hindus and Muslims continued.

Due to a lack of evidence, police discontinued investigation of the 2017 case in which unknown individuals vandalized five Hindu temples and other places of worship. The vandals destroyed deity statuettes and smeared blood on the places of worship. Police made no arrests in this case.

The court case against two Muslim men accused of vandalizing a Hindu temple in 2015 remained pending. There were no developments in a separate case involving five Hindu men who responded to the vandalism of the temple by vandalizing a mosque in the south of the island.

The Council of Religions, a local organization composed of representatives from 18 religious groups, traditionally hosted regular interfaith religious ceremonies and celebrations to foster mutual understanding and enhance interfaith collaboration among faith communities, but COVID-19 restrictions hindered those events. The council continued the distribution of booklets entitled “Peace and Interfaith Dialogue” to local schools and institutions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officers posted articles on social media that discussed religious freedom and engaged with religious organizations.