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Barbados

Country:

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Year:

2018

Freedom Status:

Free

Political Rights:

1

Civil Liberties:

1

Aggregate Score:

96

Freedom Rating:

1.0

Overview:

Barbados is a democracy that regularly holds competitive elections and upholds civil liberties. Challenges include official corruption and a lack of government transparency, discrimination against the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) population, violent crime, and poverty.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40 (-2)

A. ELECTORAL PROCESS: 12 / 12

A1. Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

The prime minister, usually the leader of the largest party in parliament, is head of government. The British monarch is head of state, and is represented by a governor general.

Freundel Stuart of the DLP was appointed prime minister after the DLP narrowly won the 2013 general elections, which were regarded as competitive and credible. Philip Greaves was sworn in as governor general in July 2017.

A2. Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

Members of the 30-member House of Assembly, the lower house of the bicameral Parliament, are directly elected for five-year terms. The governor general appoints the 21 members of the Senate: 12 on the advice of the prime minister, 2 on the advice of the leader of the opposition, and the remaining 7 at their own discretion.

Legislative elections were held in 2013. In a narrow win, the governing DLP took 16 of 30 seats in the House of Assembly. The BLP, under former prime minister Owen Arthur, took the remaining 14 seats. The polls were peaceful and stakeholders accepted their results.

A3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 4 / 4

The independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission oversees elections in Barbados in a professional manner. Its five commissioners, chosen on the basis of expertise, are selected by the prime minister and the opposition for a maximum term of five years.

B. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND PARTICIPATION: 16 / 16

B1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? 4 / 4

Political parties form and operate freely. As the 2018 general elections approach, new parties have emerged to challenge the traditionally dominant BLP and DLP. These include the United Progressive Party, the Barbados Integrity Movement, and Solutions Barbados.

B2. Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 4 / 4

Opposition parties have a realistic chance of gaining power through elections, and power has historically rotated between the BLP and DLP. The results of polling by the Caribbean Development Research Services (CADRES), released in June 2017, suggested that the BLP was on course to defeat Stuart's DLP by a wide margin in the 2018 elections.

B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group that is not democratically accountable? 4 / 4

Voters and candidates are generally able to express their political choices without interference from actors not democratically accountable. However, the governor general—who represents the British monarch—appoints one-third of senators, and there have been some calls for amendments that would remove the British monarch as head of state.

B4. Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 4 / 4

Barbados' population is fully enfranchised, with adult citizens, Commonwealth citizens, and foreigners with seven years' residency able to vote. Laws protect the political rights of women, but commonly held societal attitudes can discourage women from running for office, and women actively participating in politics face marginalization. Women comprise only 17 percent of the House of Assembly. However, a woman, Mia Mottley, serves as the head of the main opposition BLP.

C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT: 10 / 12 (-2)

C1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 4 / 4

The prime minister and members of the national assembly are largely unimpeded in their ability to craft and implement policy, notwithstanding the powerful role played by labor unions.

C2. Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 3 / 4 (-1)

Barbados's government has failed to implement key anticorruption measures, even as allegations of official corruption continue. Barbados has not yet enacted promised Integrity in Public Life legislation, and despite signing the Prevention of Corruption Act into law in 2012, it is yet to be proclaimed, and thus is not currently enforceable. When the transparency group Integrity Group Barbados in December 2017 called for the Stuart government to proclaim the law, the Stuart government cited anticorruption legislation passed in 1929 as providing adequate protections. Barbados has yet to sign or ratify the Inter-American Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, or ratify the UN Convention on Corruption and the Inter-American Convention against Corruption.

Meanwhile, civil society groups and some individuals in the business community have continued to voice concerns about corruption in Barbados. In August 2017, UPP leader Lynette Eastmond alleged that some political figures were protecting drug traffickers, and exercised personal control over the police. In 2016, former chief justice David Simmons told the press that corruption had increased in both the public and private sectors, and called for a local chapter of Transparency International to be set up in Barbados. Civil society groups claim that direct allegations of corruption are rare because potential whistleblowers are unwilling to risk costly defamation suits.

Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 because Barbados has failed to implement key anticorruption measures, even as allegations of official corruption continue.

C3. Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 3 / 4 (-1)

The government largely operates with openness and transparency. However, Barbados lacks key laws that would help ensure transparency—notably a long-promised Freedom of Information Act, and a measure that would require public officials to disclose income and assets. Information on the budget is difficult to obtain.

Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 because the government has yet to implement a long-promised Freedom of Information Act, and the country lacks other laws that would help ensure government transparency.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 58 / 60

D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND BELIEF: 16 / 16

D1. Are there free and independent media? 4 / 4

The media are free from censorship and government control. Newspapers, including the two major dailies, are privately owned. Four private and two government-run radio stations operate in the country. The government-owned Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) presents a wide range of political viewpoints.

D2. Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 4 / 4

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, which is widely respected for mainstream religious groups. However, members of Barbados's small Rastafarian and Muslim communities have reported discrimination.

D3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 4 / 4

Academic freedom is respected, though members of the government occasionally disparage academics who criticize government policy.

D4. Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4 / 4

Freedom of speech is largely respected in Barbados, with commentators and members of the public free to express their views on most topics without encountering negative consequences.

E. ASSOCIATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS: 12 / 12

E1. Is there freedom of assembly? 4 / 4

Barbados's legal framework guarantees freedom of assembly, which is upheld in practice. A number of protests took place peacefully in 2017, with large crowds attending opposition rallies and a demonstration against a tax hike.

E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work? 4 / 4

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate without restriction or surveillance. There are a number of NGOs active in the country, which are primarily active around cultural, homelessness, environmental, and women's issues.

E3. Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 4 / 4

The right to form labor unions is respected, and unions are active and politically influential. Several major strikes took place peacefully in 2017. In June, workers affiliated with the island's four largest unions called a general strike in response to a hike in import taxes, and accompanying fears of inflation. In September, staff at the CBC went on strike over the government's alleged failure to honor promised pay increases.

F. RULE OF LAW: 15 / 16**F1. Is there an independent judiciary? 4 / 4**

The judiciary generally operates with independence. The Supreme Court includes a high court and a court of appeals. Barbados has ratified the Caribbean Court of Justice as its highest appellate court.

F2. Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 4 / 4

Constitutional guarantees of due process are generally upheld. The government in 2017 was working to reduce excessive delays in the court system through new legislation. Separately, in April, the judiciary adopted a protocol to prevent gender discrimination in the administration of justice. The protocol, drafted with UN support, is the first of its kind in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

F3. Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 4 / 4

Barbados is free from war and insurgencies. However, there are occasional complaints of excessive force by the Royal Barbados Police Force. There is also growing concern about gun violence, and the ability of police to address it. In one major incident, a shooting at a concert in Bridgetown in August 2017 killed one person, and wounded 20. Thirty-one murders were recorded in 2017, 20 of which were perpetrated with firearms.

The government has taken some positive steps to address prison overcrowding and abuse.

F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 3 / 4

Women comprise roughly half of the country's workforce, although they tend to earn less than men for comparable work. LGBT people face discrimination in housing, employment, and access to health care.

G. PERSONAL AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS: 15 / 16**G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 4 / 4**

Individuals in Barbados are generally free to move, live, and work across the territory as they see fit.

G2. Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 4 / 4

The legal framework generally supports property rights and private businesses activity. The government has worked to ensure a healthy environment for business and to attract domestic and foreign investment, particularly in the tourism industry.

G3. Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 3 / 4

Violence against women remains widespread, and laws addressing domestic violence are not well enforced. Reports of child abuse have increased in recent years, according to the US State Department. In December 2017, legislation requiring workplaces to articulate a policy against sexual harassment was proclaimed.

Same-sex marriage remains illegal in Barbados.

G4. Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 4 / 4

Residents generally have access to economic opportunity, and the law provides some protections against exploitative labor practices. However, about 18 percent of the population lives in poverty.

The government has recently enacted harsher penalties for offenses related to human trafficking, and has conducted awareness trainings with government officials and people working in the tourism industry. However, prosecutions are low, and both government agencies and NGOs that work on trafficking-related issues are poorly funded.

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