



Barbados

FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2020

95

FREE

/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	38 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	57 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

96 /100 **Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)



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 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and related communities, violent crime, and poverty.

Key Developments in 2019

- Parliament altered the penal code in April to eliminate the mandatory death penalty for murder, which a 2018 Caribbean Court of Justice ruling had declared unconstitutional. However, Attorney General Dale Marshall indicated his ongoing support for capital punishment, which remains legal.
- In January, after a spate of homicides and other nonfatal violence, Prime Minister Mia Mottley augmented police patrols with up to 80 soldiers and increased surveillance. Forty-nine people were murdered in 2019, up from 28 in 2018.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?	4 / 4
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The prime minister, usually the leader of the largest party in Parliament, is head of government. The British monarch is head of state, represented by a governor general.

Mia Mottley of the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) was appointed prime minister after her party decisively won the May 2018 general elections, unseating Freundel Stuart of the Democratic Labour Party (DLP). The polls

were regarded as competitive and credible, despite some allegations of vote buying. Dame Sandra Mason was sworn in as governor general in January 2018.

A2 0-4 pts

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, are directly elected for five-year terms. The governor general appoints the 21 members of the upper house, 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. Senators serve five-year terms.

The results of parliamentary elections held in May 2018 were accepted by all stakeholders. The opposition BLP took all 30 seats in the House of Assembly. Bishop Joseph Atherley subsequently sat as an independent to become the leader of the opposition.

A3 0-4 pts

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 are chosen on the basis of expertise by the prime minister and the opposition for a maximum term of five years.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

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. New parties emerged in 2018 to challenge the traditionally dominant BLP and DLP, including the United Progressive Party, the Barbados Integrity Movement, and Solutions Barbados; but all failed to win any seats. In June 2019, Joseph Atherley launched the People’s Party for Democracy and Development—a self-described socialist and Christian movement that was joined by two opposition senators.

B2 0-4 pts

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, which has historically rotated peacefully between the BLP and DLP. The BLP’s landslide victory over the DLP in 2018 highlighted the political system’s competitiveness.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

4 / 4

Voters and candidates are generally able to express their political choices without interference from actors that are not democratically accountable.

B4 0-4 pts

4 / 4

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?	
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Barbados's 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 conservative, discriminatory attitudes and marginalization can discourage women from running for office. Women compose only 20 percent of the House of Assembly.

Mia Mottley became the country's first female prime minister in 2018. During the campaign, Mottley endured a number of discriminatory attacks from some political opponents who insinuated that she is gay. The BLP has called for greater tolerance toward LGBT+ people.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?	4 / 4
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The prime minister and members of parliament are largely unimpeded in their ability to craft and implement policy, notwithstanding the powerful role played by labor unions and the demands of international creditors.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?	3 / 4
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Barbados's government has failed to implement key anticorruption measures. Civil society groups, business figures, and the attorney general have complained of serious incidences of corruption, but no major officials

have faced arrest under the Mottley administration. Potential whistleblowers fear costly defamation suits.

The Integrity in Public Life Bill—which would strengthen protections for whistleblowers, require members of Parliament to declare their personal wealth, and create a new anticorruption investigative unit—was unveiled in June 2018, but is yet to be made law. The 2018 bill was brought to Parliament for debate in December 2019.

Barbados is one of just seven countries in the Americas to have neither signed nor ratified the Inter-American Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters. Barbados is also yet to ratify the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), having signed the treaty in 2003, despite promises by Marshall to do so in 2019. However, in January 2018 Barbados ratified the Inter-American Convention against Corruption, having signed it in 2001.

In Transparency International’s Global Corruption Barometer published in September 2019, perceived corruption was the lowest in the Americas, with 37 percent of respondents believing that corruption had risen in the past year, and 55 percent believing that the Mottley administration is doing a good job in fighting corruption.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

3 / 4

The government largely operates with transparency, however, Barbados lacks key laws to ensure this openness persists. Notably, a long-promised Freedom of Information Act and a measure that would require public officials to disclose income and assets have yet to be enacted. Information on the country’s national budget is difficult to obtain.

The newly elected BLP government initially demonstrated an inclination towards greater transparency and scrutiny by the press. The Barbados Government Information Service has dramatically improved the functionality

and accuracy of its web portal, which contains information about government policies. In June 2018, the government revealed the full extent of the country's debt burden and financial liabilities.

However, the Mottley administration has been criticized for not updating Parliament more actively about the country's foreign debt, its decision to default on external credit for an entire year, and for paying \$27 million to an advisory firm contracted to restructure Barbados's debt.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	4 / 4
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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) is the only local television station. While broadly balanced, it has faced criticism from both the DLP and BLP that it has failed to give them sufficient coverage when they are in opposition.

D2 0-4 pts

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

D3 0-4 pts

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 0-4 pts

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

E1 0-4 pts

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 2019, including a small group demonstrating before an Organization of American States (OAS) meeting in September over its stance on Venezuela.

E2 0-4 pts

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 primarily focus on cultural issues, homelessness, environmentalism, and women's rights.

E3 0-4 pts

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. In September 2019, construction workers represented by the Barbados Workers' Union (BWU) staged a walkout over plans to require them to work on Saturdays without extra pay. The matter was referred to the Labor Department in October. Less than a week later, workers at utility firm Barbados Light and Power staged a brief walkout.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

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. The Caribbean Court of Justice is the highest appellate court for Barbados.

F2 0-4 pts

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

Constitutional guarantees of due process are generally upheld. The court system continued to face excessive delays and a large backlog of around 1000 cases in 2019, although the government plans to appoint more judges to address this issue. In 2017, the judiciary adopted a protocol to prevent gender discrimination in the administration of justice. The protocol, drafted with UN support, was the first of its kind in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

F3 0-4 pts**Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?****3 / 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, with the murder rate in 2019 (49) exceeding the record of 2006 (35) and a significant increase from 2018 (28). In January 2019, Prime Minister Mottley increased police patrols and surveillance after of a spate of murders and nonfatal violence occurred in January.

The government has taken some positive steps to address prison overcrowding and abuse. Legal changes in April 2019 complied with a June 2018 ruling by the Caribbean Court of Justice that the mandatory death penalty in Barbados for those convicted of murder was unconstitutional. However, the attorney general indicated his ongoing support for the death penalty, which remains on the statute book. A number of prisoners are currently on death row and more than 70 await trial for murder. The last execution occurred in 1984.

Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 due to the increasing rate of homicides.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

3 / 4

Women make up half of the country's workforce, although they earn less than men for comparable work. As of 2017, workplaces have been required to articulate a policy against sexual harassment. LGBT+ people face discrimination in housing, employment, and health care. In June 2018, LGBT+ rights activists filed a petition at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to challenge laws that criminalize same-sex sexual relations. The laws are largely unenforced. In April 2019, a man used a meat cleaver to attack a transgender woman; the court ordered him to pay a \$230 fine or face three months in prison. The sentence left the victim of the attack fearing for her safety, as she believes her attacker might seek retribution.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

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 0-4 pts

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-business 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 0-4 pts

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. Same-sex marriage remains illegal.

G4 0-4 pts

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, nearly 18 percent of the population lives in poverty.

The government has taken steps to crack down on human trafficking, including police raids, screening of vulnerable people, training officials to detect possible trafficking victims, and awareness campaigns. However, there have been no prosecutions for trafficking since 2013, and government agencies that work on trafficking-related issues are poorly funded.

On Barbados

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

95/100 Free

Other Years

2019

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