



Trinidad and Tobago

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1,980 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 million. There is no dominant faith among the multiethnic population, which is 40 percent African and 40 percent East Indian; the remainder are mostly of European, Syrian, Lebanese, and Chinese descent. According to the latest official statistics (2000), 26 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 24.6 percent is Protestant (including 7.8 percent Anglican, 6.8 percent Pentecostal, 4 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 3.3 percent Presbyterian or Congregational, 1.8 percent Baptist, and 0.9 percent Methodist), 22.5 percent is Hindu, and 5.8 percent is Muslim. A small number of individuals subscribe to traditional Caribbean religions with African roots, such as the Shouter Baptists (5.4 percent) and the Orisha (0.1 percent). The remainder are Jehovah's Witnesses (1.6 percent), atheists (1.9 percent), "other," which includes numerous small Christian groups as well as Bahai's, Rastafarians, Buddhists, and Jews (10.7 percent), or undeclared (1.4 percent).

Afro-Trinidadians are predominantly Christian, with a small Muslim community, and are historically concentrated in the area of Port-of-Spain and the east-west corridor of Trinidad. The population of Trinidad's sister island, Tobago, is also overwhelmingly of African descent and predominantly Christian. Indo Trinidadians traditionally are concentrated in central and southern Trinidad and are principally divided between the Hindu and Muslim faiths, along with significant Presbyterian and some Roman Catholic representation. Ethnic and religious divisions are reflected in political life, with most Afro-Trinidadians voting for the governing People's National Movement party, and most Indo-Trinidadians supporting the opposition United National Congress (UNC) party. Religious overtones are sometimes present in the messages and ceremonies of these political parties, particularly those of the UNC, which occasionally incorporates Hindu references and cultural expressions into their public events.

Foreign missionaries present include members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Baptists, Mennonites, and Muslims. The Mormons maintain 34 foreign missionaries, while other denominations maintain between 5 and 10 foreign missionaries in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The main guarantor of freedom of religion is Part 1, Sec. 4 (h) of the Constitution, which states, "freedom of conscience and religious belief and observance" is a fundamental human right and freedom.

To receive tax-exempt donations and gifts of land, or to perform marriages, religious groups must register with the Government, which requires them to demonstrate that they are nonprofit organizations. Religious groups have the same rights and obligations

as most legal entities, regardless of whether they are registered. They can own land, but they must pay property taxes; they can hire employees, but they must pay government-mandated employee benefits. Some religious groups register their organizations for increased visibility and to attract wider membership.

The Government subsidizes both public and religiously affiliated schools. It permits religious instruction in public schools, setting aside a time each week when any religious organization with an adherent in the school can provide an instructor in its faith. Attendance at these classes is voluntary, and the faiths represented are diverse. Parents may enroll their children in private schools for religious reasons. Home schooling is not allowed, as the Education Act mandates formal schooling for all children, whether in public or private schools.

In the Government, the portfolio of ecclesiastical affairs falls under the Office of the Prime Minister-Social Service Delivery, which administers annual financial grants to religious organizations and issues recommendations on land use by such organizations.

The law prohibits acts that would offend or insult another person or group on the grounds of race, origin, or religion or which would incite racial or religious hatred, and it provides for prosecution for the desecration of any place of worship. Government officials routinely speak out against religious intolerance and generally do not favor publicly any religion. In recent years, the Government has strengthened legal prohibitions against religious discrimination by amending legislation to remove certain discriminatory religious references. The process of judicial review is available to those who claim to be victims of religious discrimination.

The Government has set aside public holidays for every religious group with large followings, including Christians, Hindus, and Muslims. The Christian holidays are Good Friday, Easter Monday and Christmas; the Hindu holiday is Divali; and the Muslim holiday is Eid al-Fitr. In addition, the Government recognizes the Spiritual Baptist Liberation Shouter Day, associated with the Spiritual Baptist Shouter religion. The Government grants financial and technical assistance to various organizations to support religious festivals and celebrations. Persons of all faiths participate in these religious holidays, and they do not negatively affect any religious group.

The Government does not formally sponsor programs that promote interfaith dialogue; however, it supports the activities of the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO). This organization serves as an interfaith coordinating committee for public outreach, governmental and media relations, and policy implementation. It also provides the prayer leader for several official events, such as the opening of Parliament and the annual court term. The IRO liaises with the Ministry of Social Services as well as the Ministry of Education in its governmental relations.

The Government is committed to religious freedom. Ministers, Members of Parliament, and public figures come from every faith and denomination and represent the broad spectrum of religious beliefs in the country. They often participate in the ceremonies and holidays of other religions and actively preach religious tolerance and harmony.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Foreign missionaries operated relatively freely; however, the Government limited the number of foreign missionaries allowed to be in the country to 30 per religious denomination at any given time. Missionaries must meet standard requirements for an entry visa, must represent a registered religious group, and may not remain in the country for more than 3 years at a time. However, they may re-enter the country after a year of absence.

Citizens were not denied the opportunity to serve in the military because of religious beliefs. The military service was predominantly Afro-Trinidadian and Christian, and the military maintained a part-time chaplain to provide Christian religious services. Military personnel also had access to other religious services in their local communities.

The Government was known to monitor closely three religiously affiliated groups. One is a radical Muslim organization called the Jamaat al Muslimeen, whose members attempted a coup in 1990 and, in 2001, were ordered by a court to pay the Government \$2.5 million for damage done to public buildings during the coup attempt. A senior member of the Jamaat was convicted in a U.S. court in May 2005 of conspiring to export weapons to the country. The Government also monitored the Jamaat al Murabiteen because of its affiliation with former Jamaat al Muslimeen lieutenant Maulana Hasan Anyabwile. The Waajihatul Islaamiyyah was monitored as well because of its association with the religious fanatic Omar Abdullah.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Society is multiethnic and multireligious, and religious tolerance is instilled very early in life. Members of different religious faiths often grow up together as neighbors and participate in each other's religious ceremonies. The Hindu celebration of Divali is the most notable example of this circumstance, attracting participants from all denominations. Political leaders attend celebrations of all faiths and often deliver speeches on religious tolerance that highlight the country's diversity. The IRO, which is composed of leaders of nearly all faiths with significant followings in the country, promotes interfaith dialogue and tolerance through study groups, publications, and cultural and religious exhibitions. The bylaws of the IRO do not exclude any groups from membership. However, the Pentecostals and Seventh-day Adventists do not participate for doctrinal reasons. The Mormons currently are involved in membership negotiations with the IRO.

Complaints occasionally were made about the efforts of some groups to proselytize in neighborhoods where another religion was dominant. The most frequent public complaints had been lodged by Hindu religious leaders against evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. Such objections may reflect racial tensions that at times arose between the Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian communities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. To promote greater interfaith dialogue, the U.S. Embassy often invites members of different congregations to ceremonial events, such as the annual September 11 memorial observance.

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