

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The embassy discussed religious freedom with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with all sectors of civil society.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to a U.S. government estimate in July, the population of Antigua and Barbuda is 89,000. According to the 2001 census, 74 percent of the population is Christian. The Anglican Church is the largest religious group, accounting for 26 percent of the population. The Methodist, Moravian, and Roman Catholic churches account for less than 10 percent each. The United Evangelical Association, an organization that includes most independent evangelical churches, claims 25 percent of the population, and Jehovah's Witnesses number more than 1,000 members. Non-Christians include an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 Rastafarians, more than 200 Muslims, nearly 200 Hindus, and approximately 50 members of the Bahai Faith. There are also approximately 200 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. According to the Ministry of Ecclesiastic Affairs, there are no laws directly related to blasphemy. Although the Small Charges Act does mention blasphemous language, this law is not enforced for blasphemy.

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The government is secular; however, the government maintained a close relationship with the Antigua Christian Council. The prime minister is responsible for the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, whose role is to coordinate greater interaction among churches, other religious organizations, and the government. The ministry is also charged with facilitating the entry of religious workers into the country.

The constitution prohibits members of the clergy from running for elected office.

Religious groups are not required to register with the government; however, groups are required to incorporate to own property. Registered groups receive tax and duty-free concessions, especially for building and renovation.

Public schools are secular; religious education is not part of the curriculum.

The government prohibits the use of marijuana, including for religious purposes. Rastafarians complained that marijuana is integral to their religious rituals.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses or restrictions of religious freedom.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Rastafarians, however, complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The embassy discussed religious freedom with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Embassy officers discussed religious freedom with members of nongovernmental organizations, religious charitable organizations, and business leaders as part of the embassy's regular engagement with members of civil society.