

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government. Embassy officers also met with the local human rights association and engaged in discussions about religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 103,200 (July 2013 estimate). According to the 2001 census, the Anglican Church (18 percent) and Pentecostals (18 percent) are the largest religious groups, followed by Methodists (11 percent), Seventh-day Adventists (10 percent), Baptists (10 percent), and Roman Catholics (7 percent). Other religious groups include Bahais, Rastafarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, members of the Church of God, and other evangelical groups.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom. An antiblasphemy law is not enforced.

Students in public schools receive nondenominational religious instruction based on Christianity, and Christian prayers generally take place at school assemblies; however, attendance and participation are not mandatory. Students wishing to opt out of Christian prayer or religious education classes may be excused from participation in religious activities. Representatives from different religious groups, especially Anglican and Catholic, are occasionally invited to speak to students. Teachers may provide information on other religious groups.

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The government prohibits the use of marijuana, including for religious purposes.

Government Practices

Rastafarians complained about the government's prohibition of marijuana use, which they described as integral to their religious rituals. Rastafarians stated that they faced extra scrutiny from police and immigration officials and that some officials searched their dreadlocks. They also stated that some officials forced Rastafarians to cut their dreadlocks and that prison meals did not meet their religious dietary requirements.

The government occasionally organized interfaith services through the Christian Council, an organization consisting of the Anglican, Catholic, and Methodist Churches, and the Salvation Army.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Although Rastafarians stated that societal attitudes have improved, they complained of discrimination, especially in hiring and in schools.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy officials discussed religious freedom with the government, church leaders, and members of the Rastafarian community.