

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of worship, and the right to practice and change religion. Rastafarians continue to express concern that government practices, which include prohibition of marijuana use, vaccination in public schools, and headdress restriction, negatively impact their religious activities and convictions. They also complained of being subjected to undue scrutiny at security checkpoints.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

The U.S. embassy engaged representatives of the government and civil society on religious freedom issues.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 92,000 (July 2015 estimate). According to the 2011 census, 17.6 percent of the population is Anglican; 12.4 percent Seventh-day Adventists; 12.2 percent Pentecostal; 8.3 percent Moravian; 8.2 percent Roman Catholic; and 5.6 percent Methodist. Those having unspecified or no religious beliefs account for 5.5 percent and 5.9 percent of the population, respectively. Members of the Baptist Church, the Church of God, and the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium each account for less than 5 percent. The census categorizes an additional 12.2 percent of the population as belonging to other religious groups that together constitute less than 2 percent of the population and include Rastafarians, Muslims, Hindus, and Bahais.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of worship, and the right to change and practice the religion of one's choosing. The constitution protects individuals from taking oaths contradictory to their beliefs, or participating in events and activities of religions not their own. There are protections against participating in or receiving unwanted religious education. No law may be adopted that contradicts these constitutional provisions. Legislation outlaws blasphemous language, but it

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

is not enforced. The constitution prohibits members of the clergy from running for elected office.

In order to receive tax and duty-free concessions and to own, build, or renovate property, religious groups must register with the government. Religious groups must fill out an online tax form which determines the group's activities and the corresponding taxes. The completed Non-Individual Registration Form F-15 is submitted it to the Inland Revenue Department for review and approval.

Public schools do not allow religious instruction.

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

Government Practices

The Caribbean Rastafari Organization stated that the government's prohibition of marijuana contradicts their religious rights because marijuana is integral to their religious rituals. Rastafarians disagreed with the public school requirement that children be vaccinated, which they state is against their religious beliefs. They also said the requirement to remove their headdress for passport photos and at security checkpoints was an additional infringement of their religious rights.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officers engaged various government officials, members of nongovernmental organizations, and religious leaders on religious freedom issues.