

# **ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution provides for freedom of thought and religion, as well as the right to practice and change one's religion or belief. The government established a vaccine mandate in October for all public sector and government workers. Some religious leaders requested an exemption to the vaccine mandate, but Seventh-day Adventist leaders said they would not support exemption requests from their members. While its restrictions to address the COVID-19 pandemic were in effect throughout the year, the government on occasion granted curfew exemptions to religious leaders to perform religious rites. Some members of the Rastafarian community said they continued to object to the government's requirement of vaccinations for all children attending public schools.

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

Embassy officials spoke with government officials, including from the Ministry of Social Transformation and Human Resource Development's Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs, to highlight the value of religious diversity in contributing to society. The embassy maintained social media engagement on religious freedom issues. In January, a series of posts highlighted U.S. National Religious Freedom Day and International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 99,000 (midyear 2021). According to the 2011 census, the most recent, 17.6 percent of the population is Anglican, 12.4 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 12.2 percent Pentecostal, 8.3 percent Moravian, 8.2 percent Roman Catholic, and 5.6 percent Methodist. Those with 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 of the population. The census categorizes an additional 12.2 percent of the population as belonging to other religious groups, including Rastafarians, Muslims, Hindus, and Baha'is, without providing percentages for each group. Based on anecdotal information, these four religious groups are listed from largest to smallest.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

## Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of thought and religion, as well as the right to change and practice one's religion or belief. The constitution protects individuals from taking oaths contradictory to their beliefs or participating in events and activities of religions not their own, including participating in or receiving unwanted religious education. These rights may be limited in the interests of defense or public safety, order, morality, or health, or to protect the rights of others, unless actions under such limitations can be shown "not to be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society." The constitution prohibits members of the clergy from running for elected office. No law may be adopted that contradicts these constitutional provisions. The government does not enforce a law outlawing blasphemous language in a public place or any other place that would "cause annoyance to the public."

Religious groups must register with the government to receive tax- and duty-free concessions and to own, build, or renovate property. To register, religious groups must fill out an online tax form that describes the group's activities. The government uses this form to determine the group's tax status. The Inland Revenue Department reviews and approves the completed form, usually granting registration and tax concessions.

The law prohibits religious instruction in public schools. Private schools may provide religious instruction. Public schools require parents to immunize their children to attend school. Some private schools do not require immunizations for their students. The law also permits homeschooling.

The law decriminalizing marijuana for any use also recognizes the government's responsibility to uphold the religious rights of persons of the Hindu and Rastafarian faiths. The law allows these persons to apply for a special religious license to cultivate the plant within their private dwelling, use the plant for religious purposes within their private dwelling or within their approved place of worship, and transport the plant between their private dwelling and approved place of worship. The special religious license, however, does not permit any commercial or financial transaction involving any part of the cannabis plant.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

## **Government Practices**

The government established a vaccine mandate in October for all public sector and government workers. Some religious leaders requested an exemption to the vaccine mandate, but Seventh-day Adventist leaders said they would not support exemption requests from their members. While its restrictions to address the COVID-19 pandemic were in effect throughout the year, the government on occasion granted curfew exemptions to religious leaders to engage in religious activities.

Some members of the Rastafarian community said they continued to object to the government's requirement of vaccinations for all children attending public schools.

## **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 and Engagement**

Embassy officials spoke with the Ministry of Social Transformation and Human Resource Development's Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs to highlight the value of religious diversity in contributing to society.

The embassy maintained social media engagement on religious freedom issues.

The embassy also recognized the celebration of diverse religious holidays throughout the year. In January, a series of posts highlighted U.S. National Religious Freedom Day and International Holocaust Remembrance Day.