



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **95.0%**
- Agnostics : **1.7%**
- Baha'is : **1.2%**
- Muslims : **1.0%**
- Others : **1.1%**

285,000

431 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In its preamble, the constitution^[1] proclaims that Barbados is a sovereign nation that recognises the supremacy of God, the dignity of the human person and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The constitution guarantees the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of every person, subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the public interest. This includes, inter alia, freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association, without distinction of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex (Article 11).

Conscientious objection to military service is recognised (Article 14, s 3, cl c).

No person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of their freedom of conscience, which includes freedom of thought and religion, freedom to change one's religion or belief, manifest it and propagate it through worship, teaching, practice and observance, either alone or with others, in public or in private (Article 19, s 1).

Every religious community has the right to establish and maintain, at their own expense, their own places of education (Article 19, s 2).

No community or religious denomination shall be prevented or hindered from providing education and religious instruction to its members, irrespective of whether it receives government subsidies or not (Article 19, s 3).

No person shall be required to take an oath against their beliefs or in a manner that contravenes their religion or belief (Article 19, s 5).

Except with their own consent (or that of their guardian in case of children under 21 years of age), no person attending a

place of education will be required to receive religious instruction or take part or attend a religious ceremony that is not the religion they profess (Article 19, s 4).

The Education Act Chapter 41^[2] regulates the Barbadian educational system. The law states that a child of compulsory school age can be exempted from compulsory attendance on several grounds, including religious observance (Article 42, s 1, cl d). Parents who want their child exempted from compulsory attendance must apply for a certificate of exemption (Article 42, s 2) to different authorities depending on the reason for the exemption (Article 42, s 3, cl b).

Admission or attendance in a public educational institution is conditional on a pupil, (a) attending or abstaining from attending a place of religious instruction or worship, (b) attending, if a parent objects, a religious observances or instruction in religious subjects at an institution or elsewhere, or (c) attending an institution on any day specially set apart for religious worship by the religious group to which he or she belongs. If parents of a pupil want him or her to be excused from attending any religious observance, they will be excused until such a request is withdrawn (Article 54).

Incidents

In October 2016, former MP Hamilton Lashley said: “For years in Barbados, Rastas have been profiled as criminals, gangsters, basically everything evil under the sun. Rasta’s rights in this country have been violated in the early days.^{f3]} The issue is part of a discussion about the rights of a Rastafarian couple to educate their children at home. The parents claimed they had been discriminated against.

At the end of 2016, during a session of the Barbados Senior Parliament, political scientist Dr Tennyson Joseph said that religious teaching in the country’s schools should end and be replaced by a secular curriculum. He also defended the right of parents to educate their children in freedom.^[4]

Prospects for freedom of religion

In relation to the period analysed the right of a Rastafarian couple to educate their children at home became a high profile topic of public debate. The law allows home schooling on religious grounds.

A certain degree of discrimination was observed during 2016-18, suggesting that religious freedom was worse than in the previous period under review.

Endnotes / Sources

[1] All the articles cited are from Barbados’s Constitution of 1966 with Amendments through 2007, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Barbados_2007.pdf?lang=en), https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Barbados_2007.pdf?lang=en, (accessed 31st March 2018).

[2] All the articles cited are from Education Act 1997 (Chapter 41), The Government of Barbados, <http://butbarbados.com/images/Education%20Act%20&%20Regulations.pdf>, (accessed 5th March 2018).

[3] Colville Mounsey, ‘School case is Rasta discrimination – Lashley’, Barbados Today, 18th October 2016, <https://www.luovalabs.com/projects/bdt/?p=177696>, (accessed 31st March 2018).

[4] ‘Lose the Religion! UWI Lecturer Says Time To Scrap Religious Studies In Schools’, Caribbean 360, 20th October 2016, <http://www.caribbean360.com/news/lose-religion-uwi-lecturer-advises-religious-studies-scrapped-schools>, (accessed 31st March 2018).