



## Religion

## Population

## Area

- Christians : **74.9%**
- Chinese folk religionists : **10.5%**
- Baha'is : **9.6%**
- Agnostics : **3.6%**
- Buddhists : **1.4%**
- Others : **0%**

10,300

21 Km<sup>2</sup>

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The country is an island in the South Pacific to the south of the Marshall Islands with a population of around 10,300. It is the world's smallest republic.

The preamble of the constitution acknowledges "God as the almighty and everlasting Lord and the giver of all good things".<sup>[1]</sup> Under the constitution, a person has the right "either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest and propagate his religion or beliefs in worship, teaching, practice and observance". A person also has the right to change religion or belief. These rights may be restricted by law when it is "reasonably required in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health" or when it is necessary to allow someone to practice his or her religion without 'the unsolicited intervention of members of some other religion'.

Under the constitution school children are not required to attend religious education or services if they relate to a religion other than their own. There is no requirement that public schools offer religious instruction. Some churches run private schools or provide religious education within public schools.

According to the *CIA Factbook*, more than half of the Protestants in Nauru are members of the Congregational Church (35.7 percent), and Catholics make up 33 percent of the population.<sup>[2]</sup> More than 10 percent follow Chinese folk religions. Since the opening of an immigration detention centre on the island there have also been a few hundred Muslims.

In order to officiate at marriages, proselytise, construct religious buildings or hold public services, religious groups are required to register with the state. In order to register, such groups must have at least 750 members. At present, the Catholic Church, the Congregational Church, the Assemblies of God and the Nauru Independent Church are registered. There are no reports that the process of registration is biased against certain groups. Smaller religious groups have

reported that, although they do not have enough members to register, registration is only strictly required in order to officiate at state-recognised marriages.

There was controversy in Nauru when the authorities allowed Australia to set up an immigration detention centre in the country. There have been serious allegations of mistreatment of detainees have been made in connection with the centre. It has also been alleged that Nauru's authorities have effectively denied media visas in order to hinder reporting of the situation.<sup>[3]</sup> There is no evidence of restrictions on freedom of religion at the centre. It is acknowledged by independent observers that the government generally respects freedom of religion!<sup>[4]</sup> In 2008, the government lifted restrictions on the missionary activities of Jehovah's witnesses, whose members had previously been denied entry visas.<sup>[5]</sup> Representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints reported no restrictions on entry to the country by missionaries.<sup>[6]</sup> Missionaries from several Christian groups report they can operate freely.

## | Incidents

There have been no recent reports of government or societal discrimination against individuals or groups on account of their religion.

## | Prospects for freedom of religion

There is nothing to indicate that the protection of religious freedom in Nauru is likely to change or deteriorate in the foreseeable future.

## | Endnotes / Sources

[1] Nauru's Constitution of 1968, subsequently amended, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org), [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Nauru\\_2015.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Nauru_2015.pdf?lang=en), (accessed 17th February 2018).

[2] 'Nauru', The World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency, [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print\\_nr.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_nr.html), (accessed 17th February 2018).

[3] Ben Doherty, 'A short history of Nauru – Australia's dumping ground for refugees', Guardian, 10th August 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/10/a-short-history-of-nauru-australias-dumping-ground-for-refugees>, (accessed 17th February 2018).

[4] 'Nauru', Freedom in the World 2016, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/nauru>, (accessed 17th February 2018).

[5] Richard Hunter, 'The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Newsroom – Nauru' <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-statistics/country/nauru>, (accessed 17th February 2018).

[6] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Nauru', International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 17th February 2018).